

University of Warwick institutional repository: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick**

<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/50522>

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it. Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

# **Philosophical Approaches to Classical Ballet and Modern Dance**

**by**

**Marina - Georgia Tsoulou**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of Warwick, Department of Philosophy  
September 2003

*To Lysandros and Bella, my parents*

**Table of Contents**

**Acknowledgements ..... V**

**Declaration ..... VI**

**Abstract..... VII**

**1. Introduction..... 2**

1.1 Some Remarks on Methodology ..... 5

1.2. Distinction between Theatre Dance and other forms of Dance..... 6

1.3. The Peculiarity of Dance - Dance is an Art as elusive as it is great - ..... 9

1.4. The Artistic and the merely Aesthetic (‘What makes a particular movement sequence a piece of dance rather than, for example, a piece of gymnastics?’) ..... 13

1.5. The Notion of Art (Good and Bad Art) ..... 15

1.6. The Notion of Context..... 17

1.7. The Notion of Tradition(s) ..... 19

1.8. From *La Sylphide* to *Tanztheater* ..... 22

**2. The Creation of Dance – Choreography ..... 32**

2.1. Physical versus Symbolic Dance Space ..... 32

2.2. Methodology ..... 33

2.3. Physical Space (First Analytical Step)..... 34

2.3.1. Dance Space ..... 35

2.3.2. Stage Space ..... 36

2.3.3. Movement Analysis..... 38

2.3.3.1. Movement Level Analysis ..... 40



2.3.3.2. Curved and Straight-and-Angular Lines .....	41
2.3.3.3. Symmetrical and Asymmetrical.....	41
2.3.3.4. Focus.....	42
2.3.3.5. Turning .....	43
2.3.3.6. Floor Pattern.....	43
2.3.3.7. Stillness .....	44
2.3.4. On Physical Space .....	45
2.4. Symbolic Space (Second and Third Analytical Steps).....	46
2.5. The Actual Transformation - How Symbolic Space is transformed into Physical Space (Synthesis) .....	53
2.6. The Role of the Choreographer – The Role of the Dancer .....	56
2.7. The Role of the Spectator .....	59
2.8. The Notion of Communication .....	61
2.9. Dance versus Everyday-Life Movement.....	62
2.10. Concluding Remarks .....	63
<b>3. Dance as Mimesis (Imitation/Representation) .....</b>	<b>65</b>
3.1. Introduction.....	65
3.2. Art, Imitation and Representation.....	66
3.2.1. Plato and Aristotle on Mimesis.....	67
3.2.2. More Recent Approaches to the Theory of Art as Imitation .....	69
3.2.3. Representation Versus Imitation .....	72
3.2.4. The Neo-Representational Theory of Art.....	73
3.3. Dance and/as Mimesis .....	77

3.4. The Dances and Mimesis .....	82
3.5. The Case of Jean-Georges Noverre .....	86
3.6. Concluding Remarks .....	89
<b>4. Dance as Beauty .....</b>	<b>92</b>
4.1. Introduction.....	92
4.2. Beauty and/or Grace.....	93
4.2.1 The Collapse of Transcendental Arguments in Science.....	96
4.3. Beauty, Grace and the Dances .....	100
4.4. Art and Beauty.....	107
4.5. A Further Analysis of Beauty .....	109
4.6. Concluding Remarks .....	112
<b>5. Dance as Expression.....</b>	<b>115</b>
5.1. Introductory Remarks .....	115
5.2. Art and Expressivism .....	117
5.3. Tolstoy's Account – Everyday Expressivism .....	118
5.4. Croce's Account .....	124
5.5. Collingwood's Account.....	133
5.6. Expression and the Dances .....	143
5.7. Dance and/ as Expression .....	146
5.7.1. John Martin's Account of Expressive (Modern) Dance .....	148
5.7.2. Objection to Martin's Account .....	149
5.8. Concluding Remarks .....	150
<b>6. Dance as (Pure) Form.....</b>	<b>153</b>

6.1. Introduction.....	153
6.2. Formalism.....	156
6.3. Clive Bell's Formalism – 'Significant Form'.....	158
6.4. Neoformalism – 'Form is the very shape of content.' Ben Shahn .....	164
6.5. Form and the Dances .....	171
6.6. Dance as (Pure) Form .....	175
6.7. Concluding Remarks .....	182
<b>7. Towards a Philosophy of Dance .....</b>	<b>185</b>
7.1. Introduction.....	185
7.2. Dance as Language.....	190
7.3. The Question of Artistic Meaning: Does Artistic Meaning lie beyond the Sayable? .....	195
7.4. The Medium of Movement .....	199
7.5. Dance Notation.....	202
7.6. Analysis of Classification .....	204
7.7. Dance versus Gymnastics .....	208
7.8. Modern Dance Versus Classical Ballet .....	212
7.9. Application and Validation.....	216
7.10. Concluding Remarks .....	224
<b>Bibliography and References .....</b>	<b>228</b>

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mr Gregory Hunt without whose constant support, encouragement and insightful suggestions the thesis would not be as it is. I would also like to thank everyone in the Philosophy Department of the University of Warwick with whom I discussed this project as it developed and who were kind enough to read parts of it, especially Mr Martin Warner, Professor Stephen Houlgate, Dr Angela Hobbs, Dr Tim Thornton, Dr Peter Poellner and Professor Michael Luntley.

I thank also the University of Warwick and, in particular the Department of Philosophy, for the financial support that they have provided for me during the years of my research as well as for the opportunity to present parts of my work in front of wider audiences.

I am extremely grateful to Jane Hunt, who very kindly and patiently proof read the whole thesis. I also thank Miltiadis Makrymichalos, who helped with the drawing of the grids and tables that appear in Chapter 7.

Of the many friends to whom I am indebted for their support, and who cannot all be named here, I should particularly mention Ioannis Vogiatzis for discussing with me various aspects of the thesis and for encouraging me in times of difficulty.

Last but not least I would like to thank my family, and in particular my parents, to whom this work is dedicated, for always believing in me. Without their constant support and encouragement, you would not be holding this book. Special thanks to my brother, Kostis, for being there for me at all times.

All of the above-mentioned people have made this a better work than it would have been without them, although it does not follow from this fact that any of them are responsible for any remaining flaws; in this, I am entirely on my own.

## Declaration

I declare that all the work presented in this thesis was undertaken by myself (unless otherwise acknowledged in the text) and that none of the work has been previously submitted for any other academic degree. All sources of quoted information have been acknowledged by means of references.



Marina - Georgia Tsoulou

September 2003



## Abstract

My primary concern in this thesis is to develop a framework in which classical and modern dance can be analyzed and assessed in philosophical terms. This should not be understood as an endeavour to create a system of values according to which dance should be criticized. What is being attempted is to describe and characterize dance with the tools provided by different aesthetic theories. Moreover dance, and especially ballet (due to its more solid and concrete structure and form), is used as a test - βάσανος (*vasanos*) in Greek - to help discern the limitations of existing aesthetic theories. At the same time the different criteria that each theory puts forward to identify a work of art are related to the notion of movement, which is central to dance. This process not only enables us to distinguish the elements of this complex form of human action, but also becomes the starting point for the elaboration of a reconfiguration of aesthetic concepts that will enable a sophisticated analysis of the phenomenon of dance.

The underlying question throughout is “What makes a particular movement sequence a piece of dance rather than, for example, a piece of gymnastics?” complemented by the question “What makes an everyday life movement a dance movement?” These issues are addressed by considering how the various aesthetic theories can help us make the above distinctions. The different forms of dance are correlated with the aesthetic theories presented.

The first notion I consider in this context is mimesis with special reference to Jean-Georges Noverre’s account of dance, which has its roots in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Secondly I consider the notion of beauty - its independence from such notions as ‘purposiveness’, its lack of ‘interest’ - as analysed in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. The expressive element of dance is explored in the context of R.G. Collingwood’s expressivism and John Martin’s inflection of it in relation to dance. Attention to movement leads directly to the notion of form, which is explored in dialogue with André Levinson and Margaret H’Doubler.

The thesis concludes by sketching an outline of a new way of approaching, understanding and hence potentially even experiencing dance (as a viewer). Dance is a carrier of a multiplicity of meanings with various contents. In the majority of cases a dance performance seeks to communicate a message to an audience. It is being suggested that dance constitutes a type of language, a communicational system, which has mimetic, expressive and formal elements. The notion of language is understood in later Wittgenstein terms. It is argued that dance comprises a ‘form of life.’ The elements of this system are facial expressions, movements of hands and arms, shifting of the body; all these reveal to us the quality of experience and feelings of the moving persona. Dance should be understood and appreciated in this particular context.

'... You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive. It is not for unsteady souls. And though it appeals through the eye to the mind, the mind instantly rejects its meaning unless the meaning is betrayed immediately by the action. The mind is not convinced by kinetics alone, the meaning must be clear, or the language familiar and readily accessible.'

Merce Cunningham

## 1. Introduction

The primary concern of this thesis is to develop a framework in which classical and modern dance can be analyzed and appreciated in philosophical terms. This should not be understood as an endeavour to create a system of values according to which dance could be criticized. What is being attempted is to describe and characterize dance with the tools provided by different aesthetic theories. Moreover dance, and especially ballet (due to its more solid and concrete structure and form), is used as a test - *βάσανος* (*vasanos*) in Greek - to help discern the limitations of existing aesthetic theories. At the same time the various conditions that each theory puts forward to identify a work of art are related to the notion of movement, which is central to dance. This process not only enables us to distinguish the elements of this complex form of human action, but also becomes the starting point for the elaboration of a reconfiguration of aesthetic concepts that will enable a sophisticated analysis of the phenomenon of dance.

It should be noted that the philosophical approach to dance presented in the current thesis is simply aesthetical and not ontological. The author is aware of the variety of interesting issues that would arise were we to follow a phenomenological line of exploration, but this is not being introduced here, for reasons of space and focus. This area is enormous and could constitute the theme of a completely different research project.<sup>1</sup>

My underlying question throughout is 'What makes a particular movement sequence a piece of dance rather than, for example, a piece of gymnastics?' complemented by the

---

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact the philosophical explorations of the art of dance have so far been mainly phenomenological. The main representative of this approach is Maxine Sheets-Johnstone in *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966) and in her collection of essays *Illuminating Dance*, (Lewisburg, New York: Bucknell University Press, 1984). She has also written a number of articles on the subject. The issues concerning time, space and the body that arise through such an approach are very interesting but fall outside the scope of the current thesis. Moreover, as will become obvious, our approach here is analytical.



question 'What transforms an everyday life movement into a dance movement?' These issues are being addressed by considering how the criteria (such as expression, form, beauty) that the various aesthetic theories put forward for the distinction between art and non-art can help us make these distinctions. These criteria/abstracted notions are then related to the different dance genres and the extent to which they constitute important elements of various types of dances is discussed.

Towards this, it is suggested in Chapter 2 that what takes place in the process of creation and performance of a dance is a transformation of what we call the symbolic space of the dance (the ideas and feelings of the choreographer) to physical space (the specific movements executed by the dancers) and consequently the reverse transformation of the physical space to symbolic space by the spectators - in other words, to the interpretation and understanding of dance. The elements that constitute the 'context' in which dance becomes intelligible are also highlighted. It is argued later in the thesis that a major contribution to the distinction between dance and everyday movement and dance and gymnastics is the different symbolic space of each of these activities.

Chapter 3 deals with the first notion considered in this context, mimesis, with special reference to Jean-Georges Noverre's account of dance, which has its roots in Aristotle's *Poetics*. The second notion, considered in Chapter 4, is beauty - its independence from such notions as 'purposiveness' and its lack of 'interest' - as analyzed in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. The expressive element of dance is discussed in the context of Collingwood's expressivism and John Martin's inflection of it in relation to dance (Chapter 5). Attention to movement leads directly to the notion of form, which is explored in dialogue with André Levinson and Margaret H'Doubler (Chapter 6). The thesis concludes by outlining a new way of

approaching, understanding and, hence, potentially even experiencing, dance. Dance is a carrier of a multiplicity of meanings within various contexts. In the majority of cases a dance performance seeks to communicate a message to an audience. It is being suggested that dance constitutes a type of language, a communicational system, which has mimetic, expressive and formal elements. The notion of language here is understood in later Wittgensteinian terms. It is argued that dance comprises a 'form of life.' The latter consists in the variety of elements that are discussed throughout the thesis, such as the abstracted notions of mimesis, beauty, form and expression as well as the facial expressions, movements of hands and arms, music, lighting, costumes and scenery; all these reveal to us the quality of experience that we call dance. Dance should be understood and appreciated in the context which is created by all these elements, which at the same time constitute indications of the distinction between dance and other movement activities, such as gymnastics. Tables and grids are also used in Chapter 7 to illustrate the 'family resemblance': the way the different dance genres relate to each other and are all part of the form of life of dance.

Within the confines of the thesis this approach to dance can be only a preliminary study. In another work I intend to create a more developed conceptual framework for this 'dance language' in the light of a deeper and more extensive analysis of the concepts and theories sketched above. The present work constitutes an analytical essay out of which different 'philosophies of dance' can be generated.

## 1.1 Some Remarks on Methodology

We begin the philosophical exploration of dance, by accepting the term 'dance' as it is used and understood in everyday language without being explicitly defined; whether, of course, dance can be fully defined, is an altogether different question that will concern us later in the thesis. An implicit definition of 'dance' can only be given at this point by describing its different aspects, namely its creation (i.e. choreography), its execution (i.e. performance) and its aesthetic appreciation and critique. Distinctions and classifications that are made in the sections to follow also contribute to our understanding of the term. This way the term 'dance' is at least clear enough to serve as a working basis for the intended analysis.

What we are trying to do with the exposition of the various aesthetic theories is to provide a clarification of the term and consequently of the phenomenon of dance that will lead us to a better understanding of the latter. As Rudolf Carnap would say we are faced with a problem of explication.<sup>2</sup> We try to describe dance in a way that will contribute to its understanding and potentially its appreciation with the help of the criteria/indications with which the discussed theories of art provide us. For example in our analysis of formalism we discuss the notion of 'significant form' put forward by Clive Bell as a criterion for art and we go further, examining whether 'significant form' can help us distinguish dance from non-dance and whether, more generally, form is the most fundamental characteristic of dance. For this reason we are not interested in giving an exhaustive account of the theories. We present them in order to abstract the proposed characteristics of the works of art and see whether these can be applied to dance and contribute to the distinction that we want to draw between dance

---

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Carnap, *Logical Foundation of Probability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) ch. 1, 'On Explication'.

movements and everyday life movements on the one hand, and between a piece of dance and a piece of gymnastics, on the other. Such an approach does not provide us with an exact definition of dance nor with a comprehensive guideline as to how dance should be appreciated; it only gives us indications that can contribute to the distinctions we want to draw. In other words, there is no clear-cut answer.<sup>3</sup>

All that is claimed is that through describing and characterizing dance, and in particular theatre dance, we can acquire a better understanding of the phenomenon of dance without aiming at or even attempting an extensive definition. As will be argued in the final chapter of the thesis, our understanding of a term can be satisfactory without a definition. But still we should be able to determine whether our exploration was, at least to some extent, successful. The capacity by the end of the thesis to distinguish with respective certainty between a piece of gymnastics and a piece of dance as well as between dance movement and everyday-life movement will be a measure of success in our task.

## **1.2. Distinction between Theatre Dance and other forms of Dance**

Before we begin our exploration, a fundamental clarification needs to be made: in this project we are solely interested in analysing what is called theatre dance. Francis Sparshott<sup>4</sup> introduces this term for the sake of the distinction that follows - it refers mainly to classical

---

<sup>3</sup> This can be compared with the way Carnap presents the problem of explication in the case of scientific terms. '...If a solution for a problem of explication is proposed, we cannot decide in an exact way whether it is right or wrong. Strictly speaking, the question whether the solution is right or wrong makes no good sense because there is no clear-cut answer. The question should rather be whether the proposed solution is satisfactory, whether it is more satisfactory than another one, and the like.' (Carnap, 1962, p.4). According to Carnap there are four requirements for an adequate explication: 1. similarity 2. exactness 3. fruitfulness 4. simplicity (although this is of lesser importance).

<sup>4</sup> Francis Sparshott, *A Measured Pace – Toward a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).



ballet and modern dance. (The philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of dance in general would have been the subject of a completely different project.) As a consequence, it is important to illustrate as clearly as possible the distinction between theatre dance and the other forms of dance, such as social dance, folklore or religious dance. Dance can exist outside the context of art: people dance on various social occasions, without being professional dancers. Dance is a kind of social behaviour. Dance can also be related to religious ceremonies and can be part of ritual practices. Many religions incorporate, for example, circular dances, which imitate the 'cosmos' and are said to depict the harmony and the determinism of a well-organized universe.<sup>5</sup> Of course, this type of dance is distinct from the theatre dance that we are interested in, despite the fact that elements of such religious and ceremonial dance practices can be traced in ballet performances. These elements when used in ballets lose their original meaning as they are incorporated and presented in a different context. Some echoes of their primary significance, though, might survive. For example, kneeling, in the majority of cases, is a sign of prayer or submission.

Furthermore we are explicitly interested in exploring philosophically classical ballet and modern dance mainly as performed on stage. And when we say 'stage' we do not only refer to a theatre stage but to anything that is used as a stage, since many contemporary dance performances take place in parks, on the street, in industrial sites or other sites appropriately converted .

From the above considerations it should be clear that we are primarily concerned with dance as performance and not as choreography.<sup>6</sup> The notion of performance is central to the

---

<sup>5</sup> e.g. whirling dervishes.

<sup>6</sup> However Jane Winearls in *Choreography - The Art of the Body, An Anatomy of Expression* (London: Dance Books, 1990) states '...I view the choreographer's art also as a performance.' ( p.106). There are contradictory

proposed way of appreciating and understanding dance, and the process of the creation of dance and the role of the choreographer, which is being discussed in a separate chapter of the thesis, is included in order to encompass the art of dance in its wholeness. In addition, the descriptive account of the creative activity of choreography is presented with the aspiration of enlightening the 'form of life' of dance and to support our suggested way of approaching it.<sup>7</sup>

We need also to state that we are interested here in the dance forms of the Western world and not in African or Asian ones. This distinction is complementary to the first one. The fundamental difference between Western and Eastern dances, if we are entitled to such a dichotomy, lies in their relation to tradition. Eastern dance is closely connected to tradition, religion and metaphysical concerns – in the eastern sense of the term, i.e. the possibility of reincarnation, or life after death - and characterized by stability, whereas Western dance is the product of the artistic expression of the choreographer, a cultural event of each epoch, characterized primarily by change, either gradual or abrupt.

A more general question that arises within the framework of this research and requires an answer is 'In what does a philosophy of dance consist?' A straightforward answer would be 'The philosophy of dance consists basically of attempts to make sense of dance' .<sup>8</sup> This essentially summarizes what is being attempted in this thesis, namely to describe and characterize dance, and particularly theatre dance in a way that will contribute to our understanding and thus our appreciation of it.

---

views on whether the choreographer's act can be seen as a performance. The view taken here is that as far as ballet is concerned the choreography is distinct from the performance, though in terms of modern dance, and especially in the case of improvisation the distinction is not entirely clear, since the creation of a dance is integrated with its execution as the two happen almost simultaneously.

<sup>7</sup> Consequently, when the term dance is used in this thesis, it should be assumed that it refers to dance as performed - to the product of the choreography - and not to the creative process involved in producing a dance – i.e. choreography - unless otherwise stated. Choreography is discussed in Chapter 2 .

<sup>8</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.3.

### 1.3. The Peculiarity of Dance - Dance is an Art as elusive as it is great -

It is puzzling that the various aesthetic theories put forward over the years have failed to incorporate dance in their account. A first approach to these issues will lead us to an answer of the sort: dance is not like the other arts: dance is unique. What differentiates dance from the other forms of art so deeply is that there is an ambiguity concerning the artistic value of a dance performance.<sup>9</sup>

Dance can exist within a variety of circumstances, apart from the artistic one.<sup>10</sup> We mentioned social, ceremonial and religious dance. The confusion, for example, between social and theatre dance is one of the most common. Dance as a human practice appears in many aspects of our life and the context in which it emerges influences its characteristics. It is very closely related to human action since its fundamental element is movement. 'Dance is pervasive and intrinsic to our human way of being in a way that other arts are not', as Sparshott eloquently puts it.<sup>11</sup> At the same time there is controversy as far as dance is concerned. Despite its familiarity – because of our everyday movement - it is at the same time elusive.<sup>12</sup> So what makes a particular movement a dance movement?

---

<sup>9</sup> This is the first concern that Francis Sparshott raises in his entry 'Dance' in Michael Kelly *et al* eds., *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). 'In general, two things make dance distinctive as an object of inquiry in aesthetics. One is the complete human presence of the dancer in the dance; the other is the relation of artistic dance to rituals and ceremonies of direct social significance.' (p.491).

<sup>10</sup> Sparshott differentiates social dance from theatre dance by making a distinction between '*dance*, conceived in a given social context as a specific art, a specialized set of skills that have to be learned and developed, conjoined (in most cases) to an institution to which one stands in some definite form of membership relation, and, on the other hand, *dancing*, a form of activity that anyone can engage in.' (Sparshott, 1995. pp.39-40).

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p.6.

<sup>12</sup> Its elusiveness is also related to the fact that a dance is never performed in the same way no matter how hard the dancers try. This point is further discussed on pp.11-12 below.

There are at least two more elements, which in differentiating dance from other art forms, make its case a peculiar one. The 'materials' of other forms of art, such as painting, sculpture or architecture, that is to say, the visual arts - are lifeless objects, namely colours, marble, bronze, rocks etc. The artist has them in her disposition and she can do whatever is naturally possible, with them. By using them in all sorts of ways, by combining them and by altering their natural appearance, she can achieve the effect that she is looking for, in order to create her work. The case of dance is different. The actual material of the creator is human beings, who, of course, cannot be entirely mastered, as they are individuals with their own distinct characteristics and personalities. The material is given, and the choreographer has to work with it. The problem of course is not that the potential of the dancers is limited; so is the potential of the various lifeless materials. What is important is that the choreographer is dealing with living, conscious, human beings, with their own personalities and feelings. In other words, the creation, the choreographic specification, is actively interpreted by the dancers, quite unlike paint on canvas.

Admittedly a dance performance has more similarities to a music performance than to paintings in an art gallery; music and dance are performing, not visual, arts. The composer of music encounters similar problems to those of the choreographer. Her primary materials are the musical tones, the syllables and the potentialities of the musical instruments, but the musical piece can only be perceived and appreciated when performed; the responsibility for the actual outcome of its performance rests upon the competence and the talent of the individual musicians and their conductor. A large part of what we perceive as a musical piece has to do with its execution, although as with the case of dance (performance and



choreography), it can be argued that the process of composition is also art.<sup>13</sup> The main difference between these two performing arts is that a music performance is technical/ artificial, while dance is ultimately grounded in everyday movement.

The second element, which differentiates dance from many other forms of art, is that we do not have an accurate record of dance. Every performance is different from another. This, of course, is not only true for dance but for all performing arts, distinguishing them from the visual arts. Dance is not something static, it constantly evolves and changes. There are always different performances of the same dance piece.<sup>14</sup> With a painting, for example, the work is always there for us when we try to analyze its distinct elements and give an interpretation. It does not change; only our perspective may be modified. But this is not true for dance. Even when a dance performance is recorded, the taped material is not a reliable depiction of the actual performance, since the camera only records what is being performed from a certain angle and cannot capture the overall effect. Even if the camera were able to capture the actual performance in all its aspects, the dance changes from one night to the next. The matinee performance can be different from the evening one and so on. Every performance is different from another; each performance is unique. 'Dance exists at a perpetual vanishing point for at the moment of its creation it is gone'<sup>15</sup>. We shall not elaborate on the reasons why these changes occur or on which factors can influence a dance performance.<sup>16</sup> The important issue

---

<sup>13</sup> See also footnote 6, above.

<sup>14</sup> Consider the example of Marius Petipa's 'Swan Lake' set to Tchaikovsky's music: the ballet is still being performed based on the original choreography by Petipa, but there are certainly differences and variations between the first and the contemporary versions of its performance, apart from the fact that there are also new approaches/choreographies to the same narrative and music.

<sup>15</sup> Marcia B. Siegel, *At the Vanishing Point* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972)

<sup>16</sup> Most of these factors are discussed in Chapter 2.

here is that in the case of dance the object of our aesthetic judgments is in constant modification.<sup>17</sup>

But what about music? Is dance not similar to music in this respect? The case of music - classical music is the obvious comparison here - is significantly different because the musical vocabulary is better established and wider ranging. There is a notational system in music widely accepted that allows us to compare different performances of the same piece against the original score. In that sense we can argue that a score is an accurate record of music. Moreover, we can record a particular music performance without encountering the problem of different camera angles and incomplete visual coverage.<sup>18</sup>

At this point we can pose again the question 'What is the philosophy of dance all about?' and the answer, given to us by Francis Sparshott is 'We look now not what led people to dance, which is history, nor what psychic forces impel them to do so, which is science, but why dance is something that makes sense to do.'<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Graham McFee, *Understanding Dance* (London: Routledge, 1992) also makes this point. 'First, in general, the idea of performing art implies the possibility of a number of performances. Second, the work of art is encountered only when one attends a performance, for only then is the work instantiated. In particular, one is not confronted with a work of art when one confronts only a notated score or a film or a video. [...] In contrast to visual arts like painting and sculpture, which are atemporal, performing arts like dance take time, not just in the trivial sense that it takes time to see or experience them, but in the more profound sense that they centrally involve events, which are in the flow of time, occurring at a particular moment and so on. Moreover, visual arts are fixed, as it were, after their creation, whereas performing arts are inherently undetermined by their creation: they must be brought into completeness - as the name suggests - by being performed.' (pp.88-9).

<sup>18</sup>One could argue that listening to a recorded music performance is not the same as attending the same performance live and that there is always something missing in the recording, so in this sense we cannot have an accurate record of music either. But at least we can say that we can have a more accurate record of music than of dance.

<sup>19</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.4.

#### **1.4. The Artistic and the merely Aesthetic ('What makes a particular movement sequence a piece of dance rather than, for example, a piece of gymnastics?')**

A final distinction - admittedly one that may be difficult to delineate precisely - which needs to be made before beginning our investigation of aesthetic theories in relation to dance, is between the notion of the artistic and that of the aesthetic. Graham McFee<sup>20</sup> distinguishes judgments that we make about works of art intentionally created by man from those that we make about objects that are naturally beautiful, or about naturally graceful movements. The first judgments are characterized as artistic, the second as aesthetic.<sup>21</sup> This reflects our appreciation of two different types of objects: our appreciation of works of art is not the same as our appreciation of other aesthetic objects: sunsets, birdsong or firework displays. McFee explores this distinction as follows:

... It makes a difference whether we see the object before us under concepts appropriate to art (that is, make an artistic judgment about it) or under concepts appropriate to the merely aesthetic. The clearest way to articulate this distinction sharply is to consider a case where a spectator confronts a work of art but, through lack of knowledge or understanding, brings to bear on it merely aesthetic concepts. And this means that the spectator is not able to bring to bear on that object the concepts appropriate to the appreciation of art; concepts such as form, style, meaning. Typically, listening to music involves bringing to bear just these notions: form, tonal structure, and, perhaps, a sense of content. Additionally, we typically see the music as the product of some artist. By contrast, our appreciation of the beauty of birdsong is simply 'aesthetic appreciation'.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> McFee, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> David Best, *Philosophy and Human Movement* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978) also draws a distinction between the artistic and the aesthetic. He contributes to the discussion over what makes a particular movement sequence a piece of dance rather than a piece of gymnastics by saying that 'unlike dance, in these sports there is still an externally specifiable aim even though, for instance, it is impossible entirely to specify what the gymnast is trying to achieve apart from the way in which he is trying to achieve it. Perhaps this is what some physical educationists are getting at when they say, rather vaguely, that a distinction between gymnastics and dance is that the former is objective while the latter is subjective.' (p.113).

<sup>22</sup> McFee, 1992, p.92.

It seems, in a sense, that when a work of art is treated as merely aesthetic, it is disparaged, because the spectator is hereby failing to acknowledge the details crucial to its meaning.

This distinction is important since we are interested in exploring dance as art, and not dance as a social or religious activity. It also helps us answer the question what makes a series of movements a piece of dance and not gymnastics by pointing to the factor of intention in the process of artistic creation as well as the importance of context, which indicates the understanding one brings to a dance performance. David Best supports this view by claiming that gymnastics do not produce performance just for artistic pleasure as dance does. The pleasure that one may gain from gymnastics is incidental to its main purpose. Gymnastics are only concerned with displaying technical competence and accuracy in movement. This may partly be true about ballet as well but this is not the primary aim.

The significance of the distinction sketched above will be discussed again in Chapter 4, in relation to Kant's notion of 'disinterested beauty'. It is also relevant to the underlying questions of the present thesis, namely the relation between dance movement and everyday movement and between dance and gymnastics. When we say someone moves gracefully - even when they are not dancers - aesthetic appreciation is involved, but our appreciation is artistic when we say the same thing about dancers in a dance performance. The contexts within which the graceful movements take place help us distinguish between the notions of the artistic and the aesthetic.



### 1.5. The Notion of Art (Good and Bad Art)

Before discussing the notion of 'context' we should first consider the term 'art.' Since we are arguing that theatre dance is a form of art we need to say something about art in general. Consideration of what constitutes art is central to aesthetics and it is the question that the various theories of art attempt to answer by suggesting a criterion that will help us distinguish between art and non-art. For example, Clive Bell's formalism suggested that 'significant form' is the common characteristic of all works of art and the criterion that distinguishes them from other aesthetic objects.

As will become obvious in the following chapters (3-6), all the theories that provide us with a definition of art based on a single criterion have certain flaws. There appears to be an inherent difficulty in finding a criterion that distinguishes art from non-art, and, consequently, in providing an explicit definition of art. Yet it may be that this is impossible as well as unnecessary. Art is complex and appears in a variety of forms/genres. We do not need a definition of art in order to understand what art is. It is not necessary for all objects that we characterize as art objects to have a common characteristic in order for us to be able to distinguish between art and non-art.

One way out of this is to adopt the Wittgensteinian terms 'form of life' and 'family resemblance'. In other words, art constitutes a 'form of life' and the different art genres are related to each other in a 'family resemblance' way. Moreover, we claim that the form of life of art incorporates the forms of life of dance, painting, music, architecture and other genres which are related to each other by family resemblance. The form of life of dance shares some of the

general characteristics of the form of life of art as well as overlapping with the form of life of painting. For example, in the form of life of art as well as in both dance and painting, there is the creator of the work and the receivers (i.e. the audience). The medium of the creation is different; in dance it is movement, in painting shaped colours. That is why we are justified in arguing that dance and painting are both arts but of different forms. In the same way, we can claim that dance and gymnastics share some common characteristics, such as movement, but the other elements that constitute these life forms are different.<sup>23</sup>

Another debate that is related to the question of 'What is art?' is whether bad works of art are 'works of art' and whether we should allow for the possibility of bad art at all.<sup>24</sup> It has been suggested that the term 'work of art' is an honorific term, a value term, which means that to speak of bad art is contradictory. There is no doubt that the term 'work of art' is used in many cases honorifically. But this is not always the case, for it seems that we can speak of works of art in a neutral way as well (i.e. thefts of works of art<sup>25</sup>). So the term 'work of art' can be used in both an honorific and a neutral way. It appears that in order to determine whether the term is used honorifically or neutrally, we have to take into account the context in which the term is used.

If we are to accept the usage 'work of art' in an exclusively honorific sense we shall need to provide an analysis of the phrase 'bad work of art'. Such analysis will depend in turn on what account of art we have in mind. That is, if there is a set of characteristics, which include 'success in its aims' the possession of which makes something a work of art, then to say that a work has these characteristics and at the same time is artistically bad, is contradictory. It may

---

<sup>23</sup> The similarities and dissimilarities between dance and other arts and practices are illustrated in the last chapter of the thesis.

<sup>24</sup> The main reference for these issues is Cyril Barrett's article 'Are Bad Works of Art 'Works of Art'', in *Philosophy and the Arts*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, vol.6 (London: Macmillan, 1973) pp.182 -93.

<sup>25</sup> Example taken from Barrett, *op. cit.*, p.183.

be bad in some other respect but not as a work of art. But if we think that the whole endeavour to find a criterion or a set of criteria for art is impossible and unnecessary, we do not see why one is not justified in speaking of bad works of art. After all, the term can be used in an honorific sense to show one's particular admiration of a certain work by saying 'That is what I call a work of art.'

So, as a consequence we consider an aesthetic theory as being flawed when it does not allow for the possibility of bad art. This will be explored in more detail in later chapters.

## **1.6. The Notion of Context**

The term 'context' has been already mentioned more than once and as the thesis is developed the importance of the notion of context in our approach will become more and more evident.

In accordance with the methodological remarks made in Section 1.1, a working definition of the term 'context' is needed. 'Context' has a variety of uses in English and to avoid misunderstanding as to how it is being used in this thesis we shall describe what we mean by context of the dance/performance. Context is used here as a technical term and refers to all the external features/indications that help us make the distinction between a woman strolling in the park, for example, and a woman dancing. A dancer on a theatre stage - or anything that is used as a stage - moves intentionally; there is also, in the majority of cases, music, costumes, lighting, scenery and other stage effects and, of course, an audience. These external elements constitute the context or the 'form of life' of dance. It is thus suggested that the different

contexts in which a movement sequence takes place differentiates dance from gymnastics and dance from everyday movement.

Movement is the basis of every dance. The types of movements that constitute a dance are not so different from everyday movements. A particular movement that appears in a dance can be part of some activity other than dance. It seems to be true that no movement sequence will, on its own, be uniquely distinctive to dance. Dance movements are often more complex and sophisticated than everyday life movements but this is not invariably so. Even a precise description of a movement will not lead us to realize that what we are watching is dance and not something else (a ritual or a habit, for example). It can therefore be argued that what makes a particular movement a dance movement is the fact that the latter is a performed movement; that is to say, it appears within the framework of a performance. Context also helps here. The external features - costumes, lighting, the stage, the fact that there is an audience - can contribute to the realization that what is taking place in front of us is a dance performance. But these external characteristics are probably still not sufficient to assure us that what we are watching is a dance performance and not something else. We shall go on to argue that the symbolic space of the dance also contributes.<sup>26</sup>

We note the case of modern dance works, where the external characteristics of dance performances are consciously blurred, to create vagueness about the nature of the movement. What then indicates the context of the dance? The notion of meaning plays a vital role at this point: a movement acquires much of its meaning from the context in which it appears. A movement in isolation means little. In different contexts the same movements acquire different meanings and are understood in different ways. In order to be in a position to determine that a

---

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 2 on Symbolic Space.



particular movement sequence is dance, we need firstly to describe the movements and secondly to take into account the place and the circumstances in which they take place. We should also be aware to a greater or lesser extent of the 'codes' (rules) with which most members of the audience will be familiar when attending a dance performance. This issue is addressed in detail later in the thesis.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, we could suggest that dance is a special kind of movement and what makes it special stems from the fact that we judge and appreciate it as a work of art. In other words, what we are doing here is to 'aestheticize' certain kinds of movement and call the result dance. But that is to commit the fallacy that we described in the previous section: we fail to discern the difference between the artistic and the aesthetic.

We now return to the issue of knowledge of the 'codes' and elaborate the view that some knowledge of the tradition(s) within which dance works are conceived does – even, must – contribute to our understanding and appreciation of a movement sequence as dance.

### **1.7. The Notion of Tradition(s)**

How are we supposed to understand 'tradition(s)'? What do we mean by dance tradition and how does the knowledge of the tradition(s) contribute to our understanding and appreciation of dance? By tradition we refer to dance history, to the genres, styles and performances that were produced before the dance piece which is now performed in front of us, and which enable us to compare and differentiate the current work from previous ones. The

---

<sup>27</sup> Mainly in the final chapter, Chapter 7, where it is suggested that dance constitutes a system of communication and is a carrier of meaning. One of the points made in our attempt to distinguish dance from gymnastics is to suggest that dance has meaning whilst gymnastics has significance.

knowledge of an existing tradition contributes to the better outline of the form of life of dance and to the reconstruction of the network of family resemblances that connect the different dance genres.

Despite being aware that many would strongly object to this suggestion, it seems that we cannot deny the role that some sort of knowledge - even if merely implicit - of tradition or history plays in our appreciation of a work of art. Works of art do not exist in isolation; they are part of the culture in which they have been created and to a great extent the latter is reflected in them. They are the products of a particular historic period and they should be appreciated as such. This does not mean to imply that the social or cultural background should be the only ground against which a work of art should be understood. What we are suggesting is simply that each work of art belongs to a particular era which has a bearing on our response to it.

Willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, we are influenced in our appreciation and understanding of a work of art by our previous experiences.<sup>28</sup> Our approach to a work of art cannot be entirely disassociated from our experience of other artworks, similar or not.<sup>29</sup> It is clear, for example, that the attitude of a ballet *connoisseur* towards a dance performance is different from that of somebody who is attending the same performance for the first time.

This happens partly because members of an audience need to recognize some 'codes', as we mentioned previously, in order to understand what is happening in the dance that takes place in front of them. They retrieve experience from other dance performances they have attended, and they use this knowledge to make the 'new' dance intelligible to them. It seems

---

<sup>28</sup> It goes without saying that phenomenologists would strongly object to such a claim and would try to persuade us to experience the dance without any preconceptions.

<sup>29</sup> Graham McFee claims that 'we draw on our knowledge of previous works when we come to confront a particular work.' McFee, 1992, pp.69-70.

that the appreciation of a work of art, in this case of a particular dance, is related to the understanding of it. We need to be able to make some sense of the movement sequences that are being presented in order to be in a position to conceive the meaning of a dance. In order to value a dance performance, we should understand what is going on, in part at least, and in addition possess a knowledge of the tradition that precedes it or within which it was created, since such knowledge can contribute to its intelligibility and thus to the enjoyment and pleasure that we gain from watching it.<sup>30</sup>

This discussion raises a series of interesting issues in aesthetics: Is understanding as closely related to pleasure/enjoyment as has been suggested? Can we enjoy something without understanding it? And moreover, does understanding incorporate also the notion of interpretation of a work of art? Does the interpretation add up to the artistic appreciation? Is there a correct interpretation? Does interpretation inhibit enjoyment? Should we try to interpret works of art, or is it better to enjoy them without asking too many questions? These issues will initially be addressed in the discussion of aesthetic theories (in Chapters 3-6), and brought into focus, though not exhaustively answered in the concluding chapter.

In line with the foregoing short discussion about dance tradition(s) the following section offers a very concise history of western theatre dance by highlighting some of its landmarks. These are used in subsequent chapters in the discussion of theories of art, and, more importantly, in the last chapter where it will be shown how these different genres relate to each other and are vital parts of the form of life of dance.

---

<sup>30</sup> As will be suggested in the last chapter, dance constitutes a 'form of life' in Wittgensteinian terms.

## 1.8. From *La Sylphide* to *Tanztheater*

In order to understand the meaning of the term '(theatre) dance', as well as have a clearer idea of what we are referring to when talking of classical ballet or modern abstract dance, it will be useful to provide characteristic examples of each of the different dance genres. These dances/paradigms appear throughout the discussion of the different aesthetic theories, points of reference against which the theories are tested.

To avoid confusion between the different ballets and modern pieces, the following dances/paradigms are described and will be used in the exploration<sup>31</sup>:

1. Romantic Ballet - *La Sylphide*: One of the most characteristic examples of the romantic ballet of the nineteenth century, which has many of the features of what we still refer to when we say 'ballet'. The dancers dance using the *pointe* technique – i.e. they dance on the tips of their toes - the women dancers wear the tutu – i.e. the bouffant skirt - and they dance in such a way as to create an illusion of weightlessness and effortlessness. The male dancers do not play a crucial role in the ballet. *La Sylphide*, created by Filippo Taglioni was first produced at the Paris Opéra on 12 March 1832, with Taglioni's daughter Marie (1804-84) in the protagonist's role. The scenario was written by the tenor Adolphe Nourrit. 'Set in Scotland (a locale that had been made both exotic and fashionable by Sir Walter Scott's novels) *La Sylphide* told the story of James Reuben, a discontented young man who abandons the mundane world – and his mortal fiancée – in order to pursue an alluring otherworldly creature,

---

<sup>31</sup> The historical information is taken from Susan Au, *Ballet and Modern Dance*, World of Art Series (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), Selma-Jeanne Cohen *et al* eds, *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), and Martha Bremser ed., *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).



the Sylphide. He follows her to her own habitat, a wild and tenebrous forest, but she eludes all his attempts to detain her. In desperation he seeks the help of a witch (the horrific aspect of the other world), who gives him an enchanted scarf that will bind the Sylphide to him. But the scarf proves to be fatal to the Sylphide, whose body is borne away through the treetops by her sister sylphides.<sup>32</sup> *La Sylphide* constitutes a representative example of narrative dance.

2. Classical Ballet - *Swan Lake*: The term 'classical ballet' is mainly associated with the Russian ballets of the late nineteenth century such as *La Bayadère*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* and many others. The last three were all choreographed by Marius Petipa (1855-1881) and the music was written by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. *Swan Lake* will be used as an example of this genre, not because it is different or more characteristic than the others but purely out of the author's personal preference.<sup>33</sup> Petipa and his assistant Lev Ivanov worked together in 1895 on *Swan Lake*. The ballet had been previously produced in Moscow in 1877 - unsuccessfully, due to Julius Wenzel Reisinger's weak choreography. 'Based on the widespread folkloric theme of maidens who have been magically transformed into swans, the ballet depicted the doomed love of Prince Siegfried and the swan queen Odette. The evil magician Rothbart, whose sorcery binds Odette, tricks Siegfried into breaking his vow of fidelity to Odette by introducing an imposter, Odile (usually played by the same ballerina who dances Odette). The spell is broken,

---

<sup>32</sup> Au, 1988, p.50.

<sup>33</sup> Comparison of Maurice Bejart's contemporary version of the *Swan Lake* with the classical one by Petipa is very interesting. Unfortunately this lies outside the scope of the present study.

however, when Siegfried sacrifices himself for Odette, with whom he is reunited in death.'<sup>34</sup> This example of classical ballet manifests beauty, grace and harmony.

3. Neoclassical Ballet – George Balanchine (1904 -1983) - Apollo: Despite the fact that *Apollo* is one of Balanchine's first ballets, the main features of his work are already evident in it and it can be characterized as a manifesto of the terms and direction of his later masterpieces, and for that reason it figures here as an example of neoclassical ballet. Although Balanchine's ballets are undoubtedly classical, they differ from the story ballets in which he had been trained. They are manifestations of 'harmonious design and logical progression, with a propensity for theme-and-variations structure.'<sup>35</sup> His style combines freedom of movement with circus acrobatics in his attempt to explore the body as a machine, an approach in line with an era of constructivism. He remains also undecided as to whether a scenario was essential for a ballet or not since he was a musician's choreographer. Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky were his favourite composers and their compositions helped him find his style. As far as technique is concerned, though radical rather than revolutionary, Balanchine extends and strengthens the logic of the classical ballet technique. Balanchine's work is an example of neoclassicism in dance, which, while incorporating .sports, acrobatics, ballroom, nightclub and show dancing, still demonstrates its classical foundations.<sup>36</sup>

4. Isadora Duncan - The acknowledged foremother of modern dance: The work of Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) marks the transitional period between ballet and

---

<sup>34</sup> Au, 1988, p.68.

<sup>35</sup> Entry 'George Balanchine' in Cohen *et al.*, 1998, vol.1, p.258.

<sup>36</sup> Arlene Croce in the entry 'George Balanchine', says: 'Balanchine was looking back and ahead at the same time, placing his own work in aesthetic and historical perspective and establishing the premise for future work' (*op. cit.*, p.261). 'Diversity within unity became his hallmark.' (*ibid.*, p.263.)

modern dance. Duncan tried to exceed the conventions of ballet. Nature was her guide and inspiration, although she never entirely escaped nineteenth century pictorialisation. She did not abolish structure or order, but she rejected anything that she considered against nature, believing that natural movement dance would connect the individual soul with the 'cosmos'. That is why she used to dance barefoot and she did not use the turnout positions of the feet in her dances. She also rejected the ballerina's tutu and replaced it with a 'little Greek tunic' because of her fascination with Ancient Greece.<sup>37</sup> She thought that ballet with its strict technique and structure went against natural movement, hence her rejection of it. She was inspired by the movement of waves and wind and she incorporated in her dances for the first time ordinary actions such as walking, running and jumping. Her dances were simple in terms both of scenario and of means (scenery and costumes). Duncan's aesthetic incorporated a vision of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* ('total art work'), which derived from the composer Richard Wagner.<sup>38</sup> It can be argued that Duncan's work suggested an idealization of nature and can be characterized as a manifestation of naturalism. According to her view, beauty is defined as the direct correspondence of movement and form, and expressiveness can be achieved outside the tradition of ballet.

5. Rudolf Laban (1879- 1958) – *Ausdrucksanz* (Expressive Dance): Mostly known for his system of notation – the notorious Labanotation - he is also associated with what is called *Ausdrucksanz* or expressive dance. By rejecting the strict rules of the academic ballet, he allowed for 'a wider range of human movement, for he believed that dance grew out of the life of its time, reflecting ordinary actions such as

---

<sup>37</sup> Many of the themes of her dances were inspired by Greek Art.

<sup>38</sup> Point made by Susan A. Manning, entry 'Isadora Duncan' in Cohen *et al.*, 1998, p.453.

work movements. The most important component of his new dance form was the flow of movement, which he considered crucial to an understanding of movement in daily life as well.<sup>39</sup> He wanted to offer diversity in movement. To achieve this he used innovative methods such as improvisation, very little or no music, communal decision-making, interchangeable roles, non-metric rhythms and full-bodied movement. The same dance could be performed by different dancers, with a different score, in different costumes or by different numbers of dancers. Laban was not a choreographer of masterpieces but rather one who constantly experimented with movement in order to achieve a greater degree of expressiveness.

6. Mary Wigman (1886-1973) - *Witch Dance*: Wigman was Laban's student and collaborator. Wigman stressed dancing's demand for conceptual awareness as well as the importance of the dynamics of tension and relaxation. There is no set vocabulary in her work, but one of her main preoccupations was to explore the possibilities of the cycle format both in terms of movement and of structure. The spatial dimension of movement is emphasized in her dances and is an active element, a creator of space. More importantly, though, Wigman considered dance as a language, as an organic unity of physical and spiritual forces, as an autonomous system with its own laws. For Wigman, dance was primary and all other elements of a dance performance - costume, scenery, music - were secondary. Most of her works are solo dances which she herself usually performed, because she wanted to experiment with her own body. She danced in silence or to a percussive accompaniment. One of her most popular pieces is *Witch Dance* in which she wore a mask, which distorted her

---

<sup>39</sup> Au, 1988, p.96.



own features. There is a sense of evil and animality, demonstrated by 'the grasping, clawlike gestures and earthbound heaviness of the dancer's body' which have nothing to do with 'contemporary ballet's insubstantial prettiness.'<sup>40</sup> In her later work Wigman addressed through her dances human nature, the inevitable ageing of the body and the irreversibility of death, as well as war's devastation. Wigman's work is an example of dance discovering its own terms of expression by becoming a system of communication of ideas. Pure form and expressiveness are combined in her dances.

7. Modern Dance – Martha Graham (1894-1991) - *Appalachian Spring*:

Graham was a pioneer in the modern dance-movement. She was also a remarkable performer – mainly of her own works, intense and virtuosic. Her principles of contraction and release are the core of her work. Her movements are characterized by a percussive attack and lack of realism. She wanted to communicate the American pioneer spirit and to deal with human feelings in an abstract way. The weight of the body and the pull of gravity play an important role in her works and these elements are respected, but not accepted passively. The feet are parallel to each other and not turned out, and when lifted they are, in the majority of cases, flexed and not pointed. Musical scores were especially composed for her mainly by Louis Horst, who was also the piano accompanist when needed. 'Perhaps the best known and best loved of Graham's works, and the one with the finest score, *Appalachian Spring*, takes as its pretext a wedding on the American frontier. The dance is no actual ceremony or party, however. The movement not only expresses individual character and emotion, but it has clarity, spaciousness, and definition that relate to the open frontier, which must be

---

<sup>40</sup> Au, 1988, p.98.

fenced and tamed.’<sup>41</sup> Martha Graham’s work is an example of modern dance at its best.

8. Merce Cunningham (1922 - ): A controversial figure in dance history with firm supporters and equally dedicated enemies. Any discussion of Cunningham should also include the name of John Cage, the radical composer and theorist, who was a colleague of Cunningham’s and composed the music for the majority of his dances. They used chance procedures – such as tossing coins on to charts - in order to make decisions concerning their creations. Even computer programs were used to make ‘choices’ for particular movements in a dance. Dance and music came together in the Cunningham - Cage ‘dadaist’ collaboration. Cunningham was influenced by Graham’s technique but he also made his own movement discoveries. ‘Cunningham aimed for a modernism that was not anti-ballet, as was so much of modern dance at this point, but somehow beyond ballet. His desire was to combine what he saw as the pronounced use of legs in ballet techniques with the strong emphasis on the upper body in modern dance methods.’<sup>42</sup> The movements in Cunningham’s works can be characterized as non-dance like and iconoclastic. His use of the space in dance is also radically different: each dancer is her own centre and the action can occur in more than one place simultaneously. Cunningham’s work is the most characteristic example of abstract modern dance.

9. Postmodern Dance - Yvonne Rainer (1934 - ) – Trio A: Yvonne Rainer originally used the term ‘postmodern’ to simply mean the one coming after modern

---

<sup>41</sup> Deborah Jowitt, entry ‘Appalachian Spring’, in Cohen *et al.*, 1998, p.97.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Greskovic, entry ‘Merce Cunningham’, in Bremser, 1999 p.73.

dance.<sup>43</sup> Rainer and her colleagues in the Judson Dance Theatre aimed to reduce dance to its essentials, namely its formal qualities, and relieve it from other decorative elements such as scenery, sophisticated lightings and fancy costumes. Rainer's work demonstrates a strict vision, disengaged from the prettiness of ballet and the soul-searching character of earlier modern dance. In a famous manifesto Rainer declared: 'NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.'<sup>44</sup> Dance can be defined in Rainer's case as the event when a person (or persons) moves - although moving is not a necessary condition, as stillness is also an acceptable choreographic choice - in a space designated as a performing area. The idea that dance requires a certain mastery of dance technique was also rejected and sometimes untrained performers were given parts in dance pieces. Rainer's *Trio A* demonstrates the above ideas. The performers do not try to hide the effort required for the execution of some movements, as ballet dancers would do. They do not look directly into the audience, they never point their toes, and they do not have the controlled stance of most ballet and modern dancers. That is why non-dancers have executed *Trio A* as well. Rainer's work underlines the importance of the formal elements of the dance and argues for the purity of movement.

---

<sup>43</sup> According to Deborah Jowitt in the Introduction to Bremser, 1999, 'The term applies perhaps most neatly to choreographers of the 1980s and 1990s whose artistic strategies and interests are more in tune with postmodernism in art and architecture than those of the Judson group and the independents who began to sprout around them (such as Meredith Monk, Kenneth King, and Twyla Tharp).' (p.6).

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Au, 1988, p.165.

10. Pina Bausch (1940 - ) – Tanztheater: Bausch's dance-theatre was a rebellion against classical ballet since she thought that the latter was provincial, regarding beauty as an end in itself. 'Her works have no plot, no conventional sense of progression, no revelation of character, and no sense of any specific geographic place. They have, however, lots of atmosphere, sparks of wicked humour and a pattern of romantic tantalization and humiliation.'<sup>45</sup> Her works can be characterized as surreal. The subject of almost all her works is human relationships, especially those between men and women. Her creations consist of 'a series of scenes including speech and direct contact with the audience, with loud, revue-type formations and long, still, almost photographic picture settings, always interrupted by short dancing sequences: these include an ironically suggested classic combination of steps, a short modern solo, a typical 'Bausch-Reigen' in which the whole ensemble moves one after the other across the stage performing identical movements. All these choreographical novelties were iconoclastic in the 1970s and early 1980s, but have now become common dance methods and strategies.'<sup>46</sup> Bausch has tried to defy tradition and convention whenever she can, so most of the time the stage is empty (or covered with ankle-deep warm water as is the case in *Arien*, one of the most representative pieces of her work, or with live flowers that are crushed by the dancers as in *Carnations*). The same goes for costumes: men wear suits and women high-heels and dresses or evening gowns in 1950s styles. The pieces underline her opposition to classical ballet and suggest social reality. Her works acquired gradually a more fragmentary character. They were originally characterized as provocative. However, over the years

---

<sup>45</sup> Anita Finkel, entry 'Pina Bausch', in Cohen *et al.*, 1998, pp.388-90.

<sup>46</sup> Bremser, 1999, p.26.



her aggression has become less evident. Pina Bausch's work blurs the borders between dance language and everyday life body language and in this way she poses questions about the nature of the identity of dance as a whole and of the individual movements.<sup>47</sup>

There is a complex relation between the dance traditions just described and the aesthetic theories used to analyze them. Four aesthetic theories are presented in Chapters 3-6 and the extent to which each theory can be successfully applied to one or more of the above dance traditions is examined. The inadequacies of each theory are thus highlighted and a new approach to dance starts taking shape.

---

<sup>47</sup> Malve Gradinger, in Bremser, 1999, says of Pina Bausch: 'By rejecting the aesthetic beauty of codified classical dance, she returned to the natural beauty of movement and focused on the smallest gestures – the movement of a leg, a hip, a shoulder. Bausch can make every part of the body dance. Such small, isolated movements can be happy, cheeky explorations of the body; but Bausch also shows us the other side of the coin, the whole repertoire of everyday gestures, unconsciously learned in which dangerous clichés manifest themselves.' ( p.27).

## 2. The Creation of Dance – Choreography

### - What is that the choreographer creates -

#### 2.1. Physical versus Symbolic Dance Space

In our endeavour to describe dance in a way that will contribute to our understanding and, with the assistance of the indications that the various aesthetic theories provide for us, potentially increase our appreciation, it will be useful to explore the process of its creation, namely choreography.

It is argued that choreography is the creative activity during which a symbolic space - a space characterised by symbolic attributes such as beauty, grace, form, etc. - is transformed into physical space – the position, movement and interaction of the dancers. Dance movements are movements in physical space in the sense that they are physically describable actions.

How is the symbolic space of dance to be understood? The ideas/messages/feelings that the choreographer wants to communicate constitute the symbolic space of the dance. The symbolic space of the dance is not only different from the symbolic space of other forms of art (music, painting, architecture) but it also varies between the different types of dance.<sup>48</sup> Although different, the symbolic spaces also have some attributes in common. We shall return

---

<sup>48</sup> Francis Sparshott makes a similar point when he discusses the difference between dramatic space and dance space, arguing that the visual design of the spatial relationships between the actors on the stage, which symbolize certain social relations of the characters of the play, is not essential to the transaction of the artistic meaning of a play but is in dance. He cites Paul Weiss in support of this view: 'The actor creates a place in a single whole prescribed by the idea of a play; the dancer creates a whole from a position described by the idea of the dance. Every movement of the dancer covers the entire dancing space.' (Paul Weiss, *Nine Basic Arts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961) p.210), quoted in Francis Sparshott, *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Understanding of the Art of Dance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988, p.328).

to discuss the nature and significance of this, in Chapter 7. Different genres constitute different spaces.

Although there is no simple correlation between specific motives and ideas and particular movements, the movement of the dancer is the intermediary between the abstract intentions of the choreographer and the abstract understanding of the audience. The audience contributes part of the symbolic space, since the choreographer creates the dance having in mind that the dance will be performed in front of an audience, which provides a context and expectation for the interpretation of the dancers' movements. The interpretation/understanding of the dance by the audience is in essence the reverse transformation of physical space to symbolic space.

The following discussion outlines the transformation of symbolic space into physical space and *vice versa* and sets up the framework within which the different aesthetic theories will be considered.<sup>49</sup> It also sketches the relationship between choreographer/dancer and audience that will contribute to the suggested approach to dance as a communicational system.<sup>50</sup>

## 2.2. Methodology

In order to be able to understand the transformation of symbolic space into physical space that takes place in dance, we outline the elements of both physical and symbolic space and analyze them. Three different analyses are required here. Firstly, the analysis of the

---

<sup>49</sup> Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

<sup>50</sup> Chapter 7.



elements of the physical space. This is the most straightforward of the three, since it consists of describing the actual movements and their role in a dance piece. Secondly, there is an analysis of the significance of each of the dance paradigms of the Introduction. Thirdly, a more general analysis is given of the different notions that the discussed aesthetic theories suggest as criteria of art. The various elements of these last two analyses constitute what we call the symbolic space of the dance. A more detailed analysis of these notions and how they can be related to the individual dance genres will be provided in the following chapters.

### **2.3. Physical Space (First Analytical Step)**

We begin with an analysis of the elements of physical space, because, despite the fact that there is not a single definition of space, it remains a notion that we can broadly understand via our ordinary experience and approach directly through our senses. Each of us conceives space differently.<sup>51</sup> It is our positioning within space, both as the point of access to space, and also as an object of others in space, and an ability to manipulate things, including our own body parts, that gives a coherent identity. However, space does not become comprehensible to us by its being the space of movement; rather, it becomes space through movement, and as such, it acquires specific properties from our constitutive functioning in it. In short, space reveals itself through our bodily gestures and our desire to traverse distance.

---

<sup>51</sup> It is also true that human beings vary in their spatial affinities; they feel more comfortable in certain positions in space, and therefore have a tendency to move towards them. A well-known example is the preference for corner tables in restaurants: popular psychology suggests this is due to the sense of safety (provided by the walls), the origins of which can be found when prehistoric man sought protection from the weather in caves.

### 2.3.1. Dance Space

What is physically described as the arena that the dancer has to dance in, or the arena that she has to be seen dancing in, can be defined as a dance space. And most dance performances take place on a stage and in a theatre. The stage is the natural place for a dance. This does not mean that dances are not performed elsewhere. The location of the dance is important and can influence the performance.

Sometimes the dancers need to put aside some external factors, such as noisy stagehands. At other times external factors can become a part of the dance and the movements can be adjusted accordingly. The dancers must have the ability to adjust quickly in different environments (different stages, different places). Sometimes, for example, the stage shape is such that the spectators encircle the dancers and in this case the front and the back of the stage should be decided by the dancers themselves. At the same time a variety of environments can be used as a means to extend the possibilities of dance as a performing art.

Dance performances can be staged in all sorts of environments, apart from indoor theatres: schools, churches, open-air theatres, opera houses, playgrounds and piazzas, on the streets, in parks, on the beach. The environment in which a dance takes place influences the meaning of the whole dance. The choreographer in such cases may need to make certain alterations in order to fit the dance to the environment. Diverse environments can be used as an inspiration for the creation of pioneering dance pieces.

So the location in which the dance takes place is one of the external elements which influences the choreographer, and indeed the whole creative procedure, and it constitutes one

of the elements of dance space. These considerations indicate that physical space is already partly symbolic; the further analysis of the elements of the physical space that follows supports this claim.

### **2.3.2. Stage Space**

The stage itself has a connotation of its own which actually contributes to the meaning of a dance. It is no coincidence that in the majority of cases a dance takes place on a stage in a theatre. The stage and the theatre form part of the context of what we have called theatre dance. The position of the stage in the room, whether it is elevated or not, can influence the meaning of a dance. One thing is certain about the stage: it delivers a focus of attention.

At the same time there are some places on stage that are more powerful than other places, and areas which are more personal, more intimate. For example the diagonal from downstage left to upstage right is popular and often used because it creates a very powerful and spectacular effect. In general, movements that travel diametrically across the stage contain 'laterality' and 'approach'. They have this impact on the spectators because the spectators' eyes follow the movement from left to right, 'the pathway universally followed by human beings in visual scanning, even in cultures who read from right to left.'<sup>52</sup> The dancer travels from a point of distance to a point of proximity and at the same time she covers the biggest distance on stage in a straight line. The other diagonal (upstage left to downstage right) is preferred in ballet for merely practical reasons: the movement is performed to the dancer's right side, which is usually her stronger side.

---

<sup>52</sup> Lynne-Anne Blom and Tarin L. Chaplin, *The Intimate Act of Choreography* (London: Dance Books, 1989) p.52.

The closer an action is situated to the front of the stage the more important and the more intimate it becomes, because it catches the audience's attention so strongly. On the other hand, action upstage, although more detached, can create the impression of being 'larger than life', because the figures of the dancers are more removed from personal contact with the audience. The impact can be maximized when the dancers are not only allocated upstage but also elevated by height. Despite the fact that objects tend to appear smaller in distance, the artificial element of height can transform something or someone quite ordinary to heroic or supernatural stature. Greater height can be gained by using ramps, rostra or staircases.

In traditional ballet performances, down-left is the location where scenes of intimacy take place, and up-left is an area for scenes of lesser importance. The left side seems to be associated with the past and the right side with the future. From the audience's point of view action in time travels from the left to the right of the stage. As a consequence an action associated with the present would be located to the centre of the stage. When the action takes place down stage and centre this also creates a feeling of proximity, directness and strength. Of course, in order for somebody to be able to analyze a whole sequence of movements on stage some more factors must be taken into consideration: where the dancer is; whether she is moving or not; where she is moving towards; whether there are other dancers on stage; whether they pay attention to what she is doing or are engaged in their own actions; where the light is focused.

A final factor that has to be considered is the optical perspective. For example when a very short and a very tall dancer are placed side by side the contrast between them is very striking. It can be made even more intense if the taller dancer is allocated downstage and the



shorter one upstage, while the effect can be minimized if the short one is placed closer and the taller behind. This is a further aspect that must be taken into account by the choreographer.

When the curtains go up and there are bodies on stage, this implies a situation already established. An empty space creates a sense of anticipation, for the situation to become established, and there is an apprehension as to what is yet to come - fear of the unknown. Even the speed of the opening of the curtains can determine the mood that is to be created. The same goes for the bringing up of the lights. The choreographer needs to make all these decisions in order that a performance can be presented as a whole to the audience and for a choreographer's intentions to become clear.

This list, by no means exhaustive, indicates the nature of the spatial relationships that the choreographer takes into consideration when she puts together a dance. Many of these will be known not only to the choreographer and the dancers but to the audience as well; they constitute some of the 'codes' of communication between the choreographer/dancer and the onlookers and contribute to the transformation by the choreographer and the dancers of the symbolic into physical space, and *vice versa* (the interpretation/understanding of the dance by the audience).

### **2.3.3. Movement Analysis**

In this section some more elements of the physical space - 'codes' - will be analyzed, but in relation to movement and types of movement.

We distinguish between movement in place and movement in space. In order for this distinction to be understood a unit (a specific dancer) must be selected first within a fixed boundary or centre. Dances can then be classified according to the changes or not of the place



of the specific unit. For example a dancer may move from place to place, may remain in one place and still move (movement 'on the spot') or may change positions and this can be done with a regular or irregular pace. Movement in space simply means that the dancer can move in every possible direction without any constraints. It is obvious that the above relations between moving in place and moving in space will become more complicated when more than one dancer takes part in the choreography.

Another case is when dancers dance in a group: in this case the dancers who constitute the group can either move separately within the group or execute the exact same movements functioning as a whole. Interesting also are the different relations between a solo dancer and a group that moves as a whole. Mostly the solo dancer occupies her own space opposite the group but at other times she can mingle with the dancers of the group by becoming one of them.

What we need to bear in mind is that we can talk about a place, or even better, a location in space, only in relation to a fixed point in it, within a framework of a system of locations; in ordinary discourse we tend to talk about a location in relation to where we are standing.

It is possible for a dancer to move from one place to another (in space) and this transition can be a carrier of meaning. Such a movement may form an episode within a dance. A dance can also occupy different places within a place. Movements through space (within a place) can acquire a particular meaning in dance; they can be interpreted as approaches, retreats or passings-by. For example, when we retreat, we go back, while when we are

chasing something, we go forward. Surreptitious movements usually go sideways or on a diagonal.

The above remarks are obviously generalizations and are not always followed, but they give an idea of what is meant by a 'code' in dance and are symbolic aspects of the physical space of dance, essential to our understanding of the actual transition from physical to symbolic space and *vice versa*.

Now, we turn to a more detailed analysis of the different types of movement and their symbolic significance.

### **2.3.3.1. Movement Level Analysis**

The level at which a movement is executed plays an important role in the interpretation of its meaning. A movement which takes place at a low level is closely connected to the ground and so bears a quality of earthiness, and of a strong gravitational force. There are a variety of low movements, such as crawling, sitting, and kneeling. Middle level movement creates the impression of 'goingness', underlines the transition between the low and the high level, while having at the same time a connection with both. To the category of middle movements belong the *demi-pliés*, the *relevés*, standing and travelling. High level, on the other hand, is related to the notions of elevation, of flying and defying gravity. The dancer gives the impression that she is elevated to another level and does not need the ground. High-level movements (jumps and leaps) are primarily used in ballet performances in order to create this illusion of weightlessness.

### **2.3.3.2. Curved and Straight-and-Angular Lines**

Curved and circular movements, whether still or moving, create a sense of travelling, of flow and 'ongoingness'. They are also lyrical and graceful, soft. They produce a feeling of intimacy and caring, they are soothing. Curves and circles in general, have always been considered slightly mysterious which is why they appear often in primitive religious dances. The curve splits the space in two: it establishes its own circle around which it focuses with an area outside. The centre remains always static. The curve can meet itself, producing a whole circle. This form can be interpreted as complete balance and harmony. Another figure closely related to the curve is the figure-of-eight, which is a constant perpetuation of a circle or an ellipse.

Straight lines and angles create a sense of stillness and roughness. The movement then appears broken, discontinuous and shattered. Such movements produce a machine-like effect; they are sharp, inflexible, solid, decisive.

### **2.3.3.3. Symmetrical and Asymmetrical**

Symmetry in movement can take many forms: there may be symmetry in movement of one particular dancer or of two dancers, of a group of dancers or even of two groups of dancers opposite each other. Symmetry in general shows balance, control, power, authority; it gives the impression of stability and strength. It is obvious that notions of regularity and repetition add to the sense of symmetry that a particular dance creates.

Asymmetry, on the contrary, carries a dynamic quality, a tension. It suggests constant motion and excitement. 'When someone is tipsy, he is off-centred, unpredictable, and shaky.'<sup>53</sup> An asymmetrical movement can be indicative of laughter, fear, even torture. It has variety, complexity and contrast.

When making a dance the choreographer must bear in mind the effect of these shapes, in order to use them in such a way to create the desired outcome. A good example of a clever use of the contrast between the symmetrical and the asymmetrical is the work of Doris Humphrey, who gave emphasis to the fall-and-recovery technique in dance movement.

#### **2.3.3.4. Focus**

Focus is an element of great importance for the choreographer, especially in dramatic dance works. The face, for example, is a fundamental area of focus in a dance performance. It can underline a movement's meaning, or contradict it by a grotesque expression. Dancers and choreographers often use the term 'facing', referring to the orientation of the body in relation to the movement.

A dancer has to go beyond the simple execution of movements: she must draw the audience's attention to them. She does that by using her whole body: all the parts of her body should follow a gesture of a hand, for example, and give it a specific intent, obvious to the spectators. In order for a dancer to be successful in this, it is important to be aware of the intention of each movement that she executes and of the ways she emphasizes them so as to draw the spectators' attention.

---

<sup>53</sup> Blom and Chaplin, 1989, p.39.

### **2.3.3.5. Turning**

Turning creates a sense of the magical and mystical, a sense of disorientation; it is related to curves and circles and all their connotations, also to ideas of inclusivity and exclusivity, and of infinity and eternity. Turning can create illusions: the solid body image of a dancer can be lost. Turning has a power of its own, completely different from the other movements. The choreographer best known for the extensive use of turning is Laura Dean. In her dances spinning is a fundamental, as well as an easily distinguishable, element.

It is very difficult for a dancer to avoid dizziness after a series of turns and that is why consecutive turning can be considered as an attempt to outfight a natural law.

### **2.3.3.6. Floor Pattern**

The path that the dancer travels is defined as the floor pattern of a dance. The varieties of floor patterns which can be used in a dance create a variety of different effects. Take for example the circle: when many people form a circle, that circle has great strength. A soloist who dances in a circle emphasizes another of its aspects: now the circle symbolizes the infinite, without beginning or end. There is also an hypnotic quality in this pattern that goes round and round indefinitely.

The spiral also has a hypnotic quality, but it is combined with a notion of change and a possibility of an end. A dancer can either spiral outwards or inwards. When she spirals out, she



will either arrive somewhere or can go on indefinitely. When she spirals in, the spiralling is complete when the centre of the spiral coincides with the dancer's body.

Geometric floor patterns (straight lines and angles) are direct and sharp, with a clear intention, which results in a new direction in space, a new facing or even a new feeling in the dance.

#### **2.3.3.7. Stillness**

Stillness in dance is not inaction. On the contrary, it bears a feeling of waiting for something to happen, a hesitation, a holding back indicating timidity and shyness. 'Stillness is gathering in the past....holding, savoring the present... anticipating the future.'<sup>54</sup> Stillness is related both to the past and to the future. There is a promise, a memory, and nostalgia in stillness. It has also potential: there is always a moment of stillness just before action bursts. This sometimes surprises the spectator as the unexpected change underlines a turning point in a dramatic piece or a new aspect of the character involved in the scene. Stillness can also be interpreted as a moment of self-concentration, of wonder. Stillness always has meaning.

Moments of stillness when used effectively by the choreographer can produce great dramatic effects and a very strong emotional impact on the audience. They can become the highlights of a dance performance by creating a contrast to movement, the major component of dance.

---

<sup>54</sup> Blom and Chaplin, 1989, p.70.

#### 2.3.4. On Physical Space

This analysis of types of movement has presented the significant elements of physical space that the choreographer uses in order to transform her ideas and feelings into actions, which the audience then perceives and understands, to a greater or lesser extent. The extent of the understanding is related to a variety of factors such as the degree of initiation of the spectator and the degree of the choreographer's compliance with the elements identified in our analysis. It should be noted again that not all choreographers accept the movement–meaning relation of that analysis. The movements analyzed above bear a meaning, which, in most cases, is imposed on them by the way movement is interpreted in everyday life. Merce Cunningham, for example, tried to disassociate dance movements from their ordinary meaning and this may make it difficult initially to understand the movements in his dances.

These are 'codes', general rules, guidelines that can contribute to the audience's understanding of a dance piece and the revelation of the 'hidden' messages. The analysis of the elements of the symbolic space which follows, will, together with the foregoing analysis of the components of physical space, create a better picture of what dance as art is all about. What is outlined here is by no means uncontroversial – but the variations of detail are unimportant at this stage since we are only providing explications and not definitions for an understanding of dance. The audience's understanding is contextualized by these expectations and presumptions.

## **2.4. Symbolic Space (Second and Third Analytical Steps)**

We now turn to the second and third analytical steps of the analysis. The second step is a discussion of the differing choreographic styles used in a variety of dance genres. This is a preliminary to the substantial aesthetic analysis presented in the subsequent chapters. The third step introduces and links these to the dimensions of the different symbolic spaces characteristic of the different aesthetic theories. The different dance genres are discussed in the sequence presented in the Introduction in order to sketch the evolution of theatre dance and the corresponding theories. This is appropriate since the genres are related by ancestry and have developed and branched into separate traditions.

Romantic ballet has a story, a plot. So the first thing that the choreographer has to communicate through movement is the actual narrative. The story is often already known to the audience, being frequently based on a familiar pattern of doomed love, culminating in death and dramatic destruction. But the choreographer wants to communicate much more than the story line alone. Rather, the plot constitutes a vehicle for the more abstract ideas that are to be communicated. It may well be the case that the narrative plays a central role but it is also used to create an imaginary world - the vehicle of the creation of an illusion. Movement is the medium of the choreographer's transformation of reality. The central abstract idea that romantic ballet seeks to communicate therefore is of illusion and its creation. Secondary aspects of the symbolic space created by romantic ballet are the actual story and the technical accuracy of the movements, with the latter being both a characteristic and a carrier of meaning.

Chronologically, classical ballet follows romantic ballet, and has similar external characteristics but the element of illusion is more restrained. There is a story, again usually familiar to the audience and there is again preoccupation with perfection in execution of the movements. However, a protocol has been created through the years in terms of the order that certain dances within the dance take place. The solos of the two protagonists precede a *pas de deux*, with an ensemble then performed by the *corps de ballet*. Yet the main abstract ideas being communicated through classical ballet pieces are those of grace and harmony. No matter how difficult the execution of a certain movement for the dancer, she has to perform it gracefully. An impression of lightness is constantly created, as well as the attempt to defy gravity and the laws of nature by the execution of high leaps and 'impossible' elevations. Harmony is created by measured and balanced movements as well as by the even structure (the order of the episodes in a dance) of the dance as a whole. So one can argue that the classical ballet also creates an illusion, but of a different kind; that is, an illusion of airiness and grace which is not inherently characteristic of human movement.

In neoclassical ballet, there is a particular focus on the dancers. Since there is not always a plot the dance is deprived of the external structure that is automatically imposed by the communication of the ideas of a narrative. What are manifested in neoclassical ballet are the abilities of the human body, the degree of the body's sophistication in movement execution and the beauty that can be found in that. We have to bear in mind that the neoclassical ballet appeared in an era of constructivism, so it is not altogether surprising that the body is treated as a machine and its abilities are being explored.<sup>55</sup> In this way ballet, as with other arts, reflects different historical periods and social patterns. We could even claim that the abstract ideas

---

<sup>55</sup> That is why the works of Balanchine, considered the main representative of neoclassicism in ballet, incorporated sports, acrobatics, ballroom and show dancing.



being communicated each time convey to a certain degree the problems and considerations of each period. The attention given to the body and its abilities in neoclassical ballet not only reveals the physical exploration that took place within dance circles at the time but also a more general consensus about the role that human beings would play in an industrialised society, when workers were replaced by machines. Of course these were early stages and the ideals of the classical ballet were not completely abandoned.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Isadora Duncan becomes influential. Her decisive step was to leave established ballet values behind, marking the transition to what is commonly called modern dance, which is indicated by the rejection of the strict ballet techniques in favour of ordinary movement. The abstract idea is that of natural beauty, so disciplined ballet technique and strict structure are abandoned. Her dances are as simple as possible and they are stripped of anything that goes against nature.<sup>56</sup> Through natural movement, she believed dance would connect the individual soul to the 'cosmos'.

Rudolf Laban took the idea of the manifestation of naturalism further. He not only rejected the strict rules of academic ballet but he permitted ordinary movement. His main idea was that dance grows out of contemporary life and this is depicted in the flow of unstylized movement. Mythic story telling is abandoned in favour of everyday-life stories. The tendency towards abstraction and simplicity, already identifiable in Duncan's pieces, is now evident in Laban's work. Improvisation is introduced as a way of providing movement diversity and originality. Movement is the centre of attention and of exploration. The external characteristics of the dance are unimportant and that is why the same dance could be performed by different

---

<sup>56</sup> She danced barefoot and she did not use the turnout positions of the feet. She even rejected the ballerina's tutu.



dancers, with different scores and in different costumes. What constitutes the symbolic space of his dances is the constant experimentation with movement in order to achieve a greater degree of expressiveness.

The exploration of movement is also central to Mary Wigman's work. She wanted to explore the possibilities of circle format both in terms of movement and of structure as well as the dynamics of tension and relaxation. But more importantly through her work she wanted to stress dance's demand for conceptual awareness. The prevailing abstract idea for her is the consideration of dance as a language, as an organic unity of physical and spiritual forces, as an autonomous system of communication of ideas with its own laws. It is the first time that the independence of dance from the other arts and from other external factors is stressed. All her work is formulated in such a way as to underline the autonomy of dance. Even her secondary concerns with certain kinds of movement stem from this primary preoccupation with dance as a system of communication in its own right. This analysis of dance is further developed later in the thesis.<sup>57</sup>

A further point of significant reference in dance history is the career of Martha Graham. The exploration of the possibilities of movement is directed to the principles of contraction and release, which constitute the core of her work. She also used extensively the pull of gravity and the weight of the body in her choreographies. But what is even more interesting in the symbolism of her work is the aspiration to present human feeling in an abstract way and to communicate the American pioneer spirit. That is why the main characteristic of her works is abstraction and she is thought to be the most original representative of modern dance. If one wished to describe modern dance in order to differentiate it from other dance genres, one

---

<sup>57</sup> Presented in detail in Chapter 7.

would list the following: exploration of movement and its different possibilities, communication of abstract ideas either in relation to the nature of dance itself or in relation to the problems of human beings in general, minimal usage of non-dance features such as costumes and stage scenery and, of course, rejection of strict ballet technique.

Merce Cunningham's work can be located within the same framework of ideas. What differentiates his work from that of other modern choreographers is the introduction of chance procedures when making decisions concerning his creations. Abstraction is taken to extremes and the movements are iconoclastic and not at all dance-like. This is only the beginning of the blurring of the borders between dance and everyday life movement. Cunningham's symbolic dance space is closely related to Cage's music symbolic space. John Cage who composed music for Cunningham's dances was influenced by the same ideas and principles. So a full analysis of Cunningham's work requires a parallel analysis of Cage's music.<sup>58</sup>

Yvonne Rainer followed the tradition of modern abstract dance by rejecting not only the prettiness and the technique of ballet, and dance's decorative elements, but also the character of earlier modern dance, which had been preoccupied with defining the nature of dance itself. Even untrained performers were used in the performances of her work as a way of stressing her rejection of everything traditional/artificial in dance. Movement is Rainer's sole concern and, as a consequence, her work underlines the importance of form and 'pure' movement.<sup>59</sup>

The blurring of the borders between dance and everyday life movement is most vividly manifested in Pina Bausch's work, which transcends the limits of dance and incorporates

---

<sup>58</sup> See Section 2.5 for a brief discussion of the relationship between music and dance, and in particular of the extent to which the symbolic space of dance is influenced by the symbolic content of music.

<sup>59</sup> Rainer's choreographies are the central paradigm in the discussion about formalism in art and particularly in dance.

elements of theatre as well, which is why it is called *Tanztheater* (Dance Theatre). Bausch's work depicts the problems and concerns of the period after the Second World War mainly as focused on human relationships. Her works have a clear and distinct message. They make a statement, they present a point of view in a surreal way that mirrors the insanity of the rhythms of modern life. Her dances could be novels, but her medium is movement. Possibly her work provides us with the most straightforward example of how symbolic space can be transformed into physical space and *vice versa*. The ideas that she wants to communicate are intelligible to anybody familiar with contemporary life and they are vividly transcribed into movement, which is at the same time both sophisticated and natural.

As is obvious from this analysis the ideas that constitute the symbolic space of the dance can be divided into two 'categories': ideas that are related to the dance itself, having to do with the body and the nature of movement, and the external ideas. These are the extrinsic issues and problems that the choreographer wants to communicate, which are mostly related to the period of the dance's creation. We are now into dance as a language.

We proceed now to the third analytical step, although at this point we only outline and briefly describe the most general notions/ideas that we use from each of the aesthetic theories in relating them to the art of dance. This defines the structure of subsequent chapters, where each aesthetic theory is related to the various dance genres. At the same time, this preliminary analysis provides a 'comparative' element between the chapters by identifying common concerns: namely, how symbolic space is to be understood, how it is transformed into physical space and *vice versa*, and what the role/contribution of choreographer, dancer and spectator is in this procedure.

The first theory discussed is that of art as imitation. The concept of mimesis, which can be understood either as imitation or as representation, is of interest here. As a consequence we discuss the imitation of everyday movements and the representation of actions or events in a dance. By imitation we mean a kind of copying, a simulation of appearances. Representation has a broader meaning; by representation we mean that something is intended to stand for something else and is recognized by the audience as such. The relation between the two notions can be described as follows: Imitation is a sub-category of representation, but representation is not always imitation. In the chapter on mimesis we analyze how these two notions are present in a dance and to what extent they influence the transformation of symbolic into physical space in the specific examples. As indicated in the Introduction, there is also discussion as to whether mimesis can help us distinguish dance from gymnastics and dance from everyday life movement.

The second notion that is related to dance is that of disinterested beauty as presented in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. It is already evident that the ideas of beauty and grace have greatly influenced ballet. How these two ideas are depicted in dance, indeed to what extent they are its defining characteristics, is discussed in Chapter 4.

A close reading of these paradigms shows that expression of feelings and emotions is another underlying abstract idea that seeks manifestation in dance in a variety of ways. The question of course is whether we are concerned only with the expression of the feelings of the choreographer, or we take into account the feelings of the dancer as well. To what extent do the dancers influence the dance or, rather, are allowed to influence the final result of the performance? Does dance always express feelings and emotions?



The case of the dominance of form was already briefly mentioned during the analysis of the dance genres. The effort to achieve formal purity of movement is evident in modern and postmodern dance, and is a central concern of formalism. So how does the governance of form influence dance and can pure form ever be achieved? Is there such a thing as pure dance movement and if there is, how it can be recognized?

Our original question emerges even more demanding: Can the above analyses help us to draw a clear-cut distinction between dance movements and everyday life movements and between dance and gymnastics? Can they survive the blurring of the borders between dance and non-dance that some genres of modern dance try to achieve?

## **2.5. The Actual Transformation - How Symbolic Space is transformed into Physical Space (Synthesis)**

The synthesis will emerge from the combination of the above three analyses, that of the elements of physical space and the analyses of the two sets of ideas that constitute the symbolic space. In the chapters that follow we look at how, according to each aesthetic theory, the whole procedure of the creation and performance of dance is to be understood. We examine how each of the dance genres described can be related to each of the theories and how symbolic space is transformed into physical space and *vice versa*. The relationship between choreographer, dancer and spectator is analyzed according to the tenets of each of the aesthetic theories. The 'codes' of the transformations that take place and the ways in



which they are communicated are identified. Some of the relations between certain genres and particular theories are already apparent.<sup>60</sup>

The relationship between dance and music is a recurring theme in any discussion of dance. The way choreographers use music during the process of creating a dance varies. Music can constitute the stimulus and represent the starting point for choreography. In such cases dance forms follow music forms. There are two ways in which this can be done. The musical piece can be used as an accompaniment to dance, as a basis, and some or all of the diarthoses of dance can be grounded in all or some of the diarthoses of music. Alternatively the dance and music can be in counterpoint - the musical piece can be used as a source of a dance piece with an idea being extracted from the musical piece and expressed in dance movements, without its being necessary for the dance forms to follow the musical forms.<sup>61</sup> It is also possible for the music to be added to an already finished choreography.<sup>62</sup> (Of course, there is also the possibility of the parallel creation of the two, as with the works of Merce Cunningham and John Cage.<sup>63</sup>)

The symbolic space of the music usually influences the symbolic space of the dance. Consider the example of 'Swan Lake', the famous classical ballet choreographed by Marius Petipa to Tchaikovsky's existing music, previously composed for a failed ballet. The story line, the narrative, is the first element of its symbolic space. The choreographer has a story to tell.

---

<sup>60</sup> Consider the relation between Yvonne Rainer's work and the claims of formalism.

<sup>61</sup> George Balanchine thought that a choreographer cannot invent rhythms, he can only reflect them in movement. In this case the music imposes its structure on the dance.

<sup>62</sup> Martha Graham is a good example. 'When I work with a composer I usually give him a detailed script... There is a kind of order, a sequence I try to bring to the script in terms of placement and the means of the dances. Here, for instance, I will note that there is to be a solo, and here a duet; this is to be the company, and this is to be a return to the solo, and so on, throughout the script...' *Blood Memory: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

<sup>63</sup> See the discussion in the previous section. Cunningham rejected Balanchine's approach to music. He thought that the ideas of the dance come solely from movement and are embedded in movement, and music has nothing to do with this.

The different characters that the dancers represent in the ballet are another element of symbolic space. There are in addition a variety of abstract ideas, such as the notion of beauty, that the choreographer wants to communicate. We should also bear in mind that the well-known score by Tchaikovsky brought within it another set of its own symbolisms that were or were not taken into consideration by the choreographer and as a consequence inevitably influenced the symbolic space of the dance.

This does not mean that dance cannot exist without music. There are many modern dances that are performed in complete silence with the only soundtrack being the dancers' steps and breathing. One could say that the music is present through its absence, but this does not constitute an argument against the autonomy of dance. Music is a different form of art with its own 'codes' and rules, which shares some of the characteristics of dance. However, the 'form of life' of music is different from that of dance, even if music can sometimes contribute to the understanding of dance - mainly because we are more familiar with music than we are with dance.

Returning to the detailed analyses, we argue that it makes sense to see dance as a type of language with its own 'codes' and rules with these being known to choreographers, dancers and audience. We have identified three agents of communication and interpretation of the transformation from the choreographed symbolic space, via physical space, to the audience's symbolic space. In the remainder of this preliminary analysis we shall further define both the role and the differences between the agents, so as to illuminate the traditional aesthetic categories discussed in the ensuing chapters.

## 2.6. The Role of the Choreographer – The Role of the Dancer

As has already been argued, the choreographer with the help of the dancers (dancers who can be reduced to simple executors of the movements or be actively involved in the choreography), and with movement as the main medium (lighting, costumes, scenery, music are other parameters of the transformation), transforms the symbolic space into physical space. In this section we try to analyse the relation between the choreographer and the dancer and the different role that the dancer can play in different genres. A straightforward example of the contrast would be the dancers in classical ballet who are mere executors of steps and movements already set, while in Merce Cunningham's works dancers are asked to contribute to the actual creation of the dance with their own ideas as to how a specific piece of music should be choreographed or how a particular movement should be executed. In short, the dancer, one way or the other, needs to be made communicant to the choreographer's symbolic space and how she is to contribute to its transformation into movement.

A dancer needs to be able to dance<sup>64</sup> while the choreographer needs to know how to create and design, to organize a dance. The traditional view of the relation between choreographer and dancer is that the choreographer tells the dancer what is to be done either by specifying what movements are to be performed - where, when and how the dancer should move - or by describing the context in which the dance takes place, or by using terms of 'a known language', a code, mainly referring to movement sequences in ballet, which have a

---

<sup>64</sup> Although Rainer's use of untrained performers blurs the boundaries between dancers and non-dancers.

specific name.<sup>65</sup> In fact the choreographer does not need to say much to a dancer when they are both aware of the same language – standard ballet terminology.

What the choreographer is trying to do is to explain and share with the dancers the symbolic space, the ideas and feelings that she wants to communicate through the work and how they are to be transformed into physical space. Moreover this needs to be done in such a way that it will not only be intelligible to the dancers but to the audience as well. This constitutes the peculiarity of choreography: not every aspect of a dance can be choreographed. When the choreographer teaches the steps and the specific movements to the dancers, she has also to describe the imaginary context in which all these actions and movements take place, in order to make the dancer express through her movement the appropriate feeling to each quality. That is why 'codes' are created in order to facilitate understanding between the choreographer and the dancers and consequently between them and the spectators.<sup>66</sup>

There are cases where an original choreography is designed for a certain dancer. When some choreographers create a dance they have in mind the bodies and the physical capabilities of particular dancers. The bodies of such dancers carry their own symbolisms that can be used to contribute to the meaning of a dance. Of course when the same choreography is performed by another dance company some alterations and modifications will occur in order for the choreography to fit that company and the abilities of its dancers. As a result some of the symbolism may change. There are also other factors that can cause modification to the original choreography, such as the place of the performance, the number of the dancers who

---

<sup>65</sup> Such as *arabesque* or *pas de chat*.

<sup>66</sup> 'What is *perceived* by the spectator is very much dependent upon how the dancer *conceives* what is required and how well she is able to embody what is seen to be appropriate.' Peter J. Arnorld, 'Aspects of the Dancer's Role in the Art of Dance', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 34(1), 2000, p.90.



constitute the group, the technical support of the theatre. These factors clearly influence the performance and its transferred meaning.

What does the choreographer do? First of all the choreographer needs to have a complete idea about the whole dance, what goes before and what after every single movement or dance episode, how the feelings change from one scene to another, the so-called 'architectonics' of the whole work, which are the relations between the dancers and how these change throughout the dance. The choreographer is the composer of dances. *The Dance Encyclopedia* defines *choreography* as: 'The art of composing dances; the science of putting together steps to form a dance and separate dances to form a dance composition or ballet.' The use of the word 'science' here suggests that choreography is a discipline which needs to be mastered. There is no need, on the other hand, for a dancer to be able to create sequences of movements in order for her to be able to create shapes on the stage.

Sparshott believes that the difference between the choreographer and the dancer, when their roles are distinct, is similar to the distinction that Aristotle made in his *Metaphysics 1* between experience and art. Experience will guide us to a deeper insight into the underlying and already existing principles. But then it is necessary to codify and reconstruct the uncovered connections in order to make the field intelligible as a unity. This must be the view of many choreographers when they argue that their creations are based on the analysis of basic human movement. Balanchine says

Choreographic movements are the basic movements which underlie all gesture and action and the choreographer must train himself to discover them... It is natural that these basic movements will at first seem affected and artificial to the body, which is accustomed only to the practical movements of everyday life... The choreographer... turns, not away from life, but to its source.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> George Balanchine, *Notes on Choreography*, in Anatole Chujoy and P.W. Manchester eds, *The Dance Encyclopedia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967) pp. 77-81.



What Balanchine wants to stress here is that the choreographer starts from the basic everyday movements and then transforms them into dance movements by giving them a different meaning. Which are the basic movements (if indeed there are any) is a major issue of conflict among choreographers.

The main distinction, in artistic terms, between a choreographer and a dancer is considered to be that the choreographer is the inventor, the creator of the work of art who takes responsibility for the whole of the dance, whereas the dancer is the executor, taking the responsibility, like any other artist, for the performance of her part. As has been made clear the choreographer must take into consideration a variety of aspects in order to produce a complete work of art ready for performance. Choreography is a very complex procedure: lots of decisions need to be made, many people apart from the choreographer are involved, various difficulties and obstacles must be overcome, risks taken and challenges met. Artistic exploitation in dance can be thought to depend on what the human body is capable of; but this should not be apprehended as a constraint on what can be achieved, but as a challenge for overcoming the limits. It seems that Alexandra Carter is right: 'Dance making is a dynamic activity which allows for personal exploration, experiment and alternative approaches.'<sup>68</sup>

## **2.7. The Role of the Spectator**

It is not only the dancers who are made communicants to the choreographer's symbolic space and contribute to a greater or lesser degree to the realization of a dance performance; the spectators, too, constitute an important part of the symbolic space. The choreographer

---

<sup>68</sup> Alexandra Carter ed., *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) p.21.

creates the piece intending that the dance be performed in front of an audience. The extent to which this is taken into consideration and influences the creative procedure varies between the different genres. Modern and post-modern choreographers such as Cunningham and Rainer are generally thought to pay less attention to the audience, even perhaps ignoring it; a fact that is justified by the great degree of abstraction observed in their works. But still, they want to communicate something, they want to pass a message across to the audience. In some of Pina Bausch's performances the audience is even asked to participate in the dance when they are asked either to clap with the dancers or to mimic basic hand movements.<sup>69</sup>

That is why we have said that the interpretation/understanding of a particular dance by the audience is in essence the reverse transformation of physical space to symbolic space. The audience perceives the sequences of movements on a first level and tries to unfold their meaning. This does not mean that they try to 'translate' each and every movement into something intelligible, but more that they attempt to grasp the main abstract ideas of the piece. When this is achieved they can persist with exploring secondary ideas.

But for the audience to be in a position to become involved in such a process, some knowledge of the 'codes', of the rules of the dance language, is a prerequisite. Expert knowledge is not required, but an experience of other performances is beneficial in the 'decoding' of the dance movements. In the chapters dedicated to the particular aesthetic theories we explain in more detail the role that the spectator is considered to play, according to each aesthetic theory. What is important to bear in mind is that the audience shares the symbolic space of the performance.

---

<sup>69</sup> It has been suggested that Pina Bausch used this technique to manifest the exploitation of the public by leaders in totalitarian regimes.

## 2.8. The Notion of Communication

A recurring notion throughout the current chapter is that of communication. We have already shown that a way of communication must be established between the choreographer and the dancers, the dancers must communicate amongst themselves in order to synchronize their movements and an attempt made to communicate a message to the audience by both the choreographer and the dancers. We have also claimed that the choreographer needs to communicate her symbolic space to the dancer and that the communication is achieved between the choreographer/dancer and the viewers when the audience recognizes the original transformation of symbolic space to physical space and they are able to reverse it; to understand the significance or meaning of the physical performance.

The question arises as to how exactly communication should be understood in this context. The classic attempt to understand communication is in terms of the intentions of the person who makes the utterance, or, better, who sends the message. Paul Grice put this 'criterion' forward in 1957<sup>70</sup>. According to him, a communication can be characterized as successful when the audience recognizes the speaker's – or in our case, the choreographer's - intention. According to our approach the spectators are in a position to understand the message sent by the choreographer when they can decode the movements presented to them. But Grice's analysis refers to the way verbal language works: we use words to mean things and to communicate these meanings. In the case of dance language, stage movements are used to mean things and to communicate these meanings.

---

<sup>70</sup> Paul Grice, 'Meaning', *Philosophical Review*, 66 (1967): 377-88.

## 2.9. Dance versus Everyday-Life Movement

It now becomes clearer what makes dance movements different from everyday movements. The fact that dance movements are choreographed movements differentiates them from everyday life movements, which have utilitarian rather than symbolic significance. Dance movements are not only intentional movements, they are pre-designed movements. Even in the case of improvisation<sup>71</sup> there is a plan according to which improvisation will occur and evolve.

But one could argue: what about many ordinary, mundane movements – such as waving of hands? Hand waving frequently has a symbolic significance. How are such ordinary movements different from dance movements? The movements we make with our hands either stand for words that we do not utter – as when we raise our arm to draw somebody's attention instead of calling to them – or they are used to emphasize what we want to say. The same gestures can be used in a dance performance. The nature of the movement is the same; the difference lies in the context in which the movement is executed. A policeman raises his palm to make a driver stop. The same movement can be used in a dance with the same significance, to make somebody stop. The first is an everyday life movement while the second is an everyday life movement turned into a dance movement because it is part of a dance and it has been choreographed.

This argument is even stronger when considering our other initial question: what differentiates dance from gymnastics? A gymnastics demonstration requires pre-choreographed movement sequences to demonstrate the competence of the executor in

---

<sup>71</sup> Such as Merce Cunningham's choreographies.



competition, but lacks further symbolic significance. We argue later that dance and gymnastics constitute two different but related 'forms of life' and as a consequence what differentiates them from each other is the different context in which they take place and the different symbolic space of each activity.<sup>72</sup>

## **2.10. Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter we have argued that choreography is the creative activity during which symbolic space is transformed into physical space. We have also analyzed movements, the elements of the physical space, and we have outlined the elements of the symbolic space in characteristic examples of dance, as well as relating them to the abstract ideas put forward in the aesthetic theories that will be discussed in the following chapters.

We have set the framework in which dance will be analyzed by arguing that an understanding of dance will emerge from the combination and amalgamation of the symbolic aspects of the individual dance genres and each of the aesthetic theories. Within the framework of each aesthetic theory the relation between choreographer, dancer and viewer can be characterized and analyzed.

We have also begun to clarify the notion of communication and how it is used in the current thesis. The notion of communication recurs throughout our discussion and is closely related to that of meaning. Understanding how meaning can be communicated via movement is central to the success of the project.

---

<sup>72</sup> The whole issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.



We also discussed the relation between dance and music, supporting the autonomy of dance from music, but acknowledging that the music of a dance can influence the symbolic space of that dance and can contribute to our understanding and interpretation of it.

It has also been argued that the fact that dance movement is choreographed significant movement is one of the arguments for the distinction between dance and everyday life movement, although at the same time it is also what distinguishes dance from gymnastics.

Finally, it was made clear that the human factor in this form of art plays a decisive role: the dancers are the primary medium for carrying the message of the choreographer to the spectators; with their bodies they visualize the idea of the choreographer. Moreover, the audience's response to what the choreographer has to say through the dance also contributes to the complete picture of the work of art and is of great significance to its creator. This is one of the reasons why analysis of the creation and performance of a dance is so complex.

In the chapters which follow we pursue the analysis further in terms of some of the most influential aesthetic theories.

### **3. Dance as Mimesis (Imitation/Representation)**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

In this chapter we discuss how one of the most dominant theories of art in Western tradition, namely the theory of art as imitation/representation, can be applied to the art of dance.<sup>73</sup> We are interested in exploring the notion of 'mimesis' as presented in this theory and its relation to dance. We are not concerned with this theory in general and the debate over whether it provides us with a satisfactory account of art, but with the abstract idea of mimesis.

After the presentation and elaboration of the theory we discuss what role the mimetic elements play in a dance and to what extent they actually do, or should, influence our characterization and judgment of a particular dance. The influence of the abstract notion of 'mimesis' to the symbolic space of dance as a whole is a central issue; thus we need to investigate whether mimesis is an (important) element of dance and to what extent these mimetic elements are communicated to the audience. We then explore whether imitation and representation are elements of the various dance genres with which we are concerned. The ideas of Jean-George Noverre are discussed in some detail.

We conclude by considering whether mimesis provides us with satisfactory answers to the initial questions concerning the distinction between dance and everyday movement and between dance and gymnastics, as well as whether mimesis can be said to be a central characteristic of some of the dance genres described. Finally, we are investigating whether the notion of mimesis can contribute to our understanding and explication of dance.

---

<sup>73</sup> The terms 'imitation' and 'representation' are not interchangeable. Their difference is discussed in Section 3.2.3 of the current chapter.

### 3.2. Art, Imitation and Representation

A plethora of different meanings have been attached to the term *mimesis* in each historical period. In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Glenn W. Most defines *mimesis* as 'A crucial term in the literary theories of Plato and Aristotle, [which] describes the relation between the words of a literary work and the actions and events they recount. In Plato the term usually means 'imitation' and suggests that poetry is derived from and inferior to reality; in Aristotle, it loses this pejorative connotation and tends to mean simply 'representation' and to indicate that the world presented in a poem is much like, but not identical with, our own.'<sup>74</sup>

Mimesis is usually translated as 'imitation', but its meaning is closer to 'instantiation'. Divine, past or canonical objects, events or actions that belong to a more valuable domain of reality than that of our everyday lives and are in a way remote from us, enjoin upon us the obligation to restore their actuality. But the term *mimesis* is ambivalent, because it 'can emphasize either the actualization's inferiority compared to its model or [the] relative superiority it acquires by its temporary participation in the model's prestige.'<sup>75</sup> This issue of relative inferiority or superiority of the imitation (a representation of an everyday object and of a divine object respectively) applies to dance as well and it is discussed later in this chapter in terms of whether mimetic dances are more or less authentic than non-representational dances.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Edward Craig ed., *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) p.381.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p.381.

<sup>76</sup> Another interesting point is whether we can talk about degrees of imitation and the extent to which representation can be avoided altogether despite the choreographer's efforts; but this issue will be discussed in relation to the particular examples in a later section of this chapter.

### 3.2.1. Plato and Aristotle on Mimesis

The various current theories of art as imitation or representation stem mainly from the way *mimesis* was understood and presented by Plato in *The Republic* and Aristotle in the *Poetics*.

Plato thought of representation as imitation; and by imitation here he meant a kind of copying, a simulation of appearances. According to Plato *mimesis* designates the production of illusion. There are three different usages of the term *mimesis* in *The Republic*. Firstly, in Book II, the term applies to the relation of meaning between utterances and the entities to which they refer. Then, in Book III, *mimesis* is used as a technical term in relation to tragedy, when actors played the roles of heroes and gods. Finally, in Book X, after having established that there are different levels of reality, he criticizes non-philosophical *mimesis*, and argues that contemporary poets, and in particular dramatists, should be excluded from his ideal city, since all poetry and drama is deceptively mimetic. This is because poetic or dramatic works of art are second representations of the forms, since the objects of the external world are first representations of the forms that exist in a transcendent reality and the works of art are representations of these objects, which are themselves representations. Plato also considered this simulation of appearances as harmful for the citizens because he thought that such appearances appeal to and encourage the emotions, and this is socially dangerous and harmful: a measure of the power of art, including dance.

Aristotle's view, as expressed mainly in his *Poetics* was subtler. Aristotle disengages *mimesis* from any hint of inferiority to the reality and broadens the use of the term to incorporate all imaginative literature, even the Platonic dialogues. The term is used to describe

not what really happened but the sort of thing that could happen. For Aristotle, *mimesis* is not only related to the re-creation of existing objects but also to the possibility of changing them in order to beautify them, to improve and universalize individual qualities. In his main example, the case of tragedy, the poet creates fictional worlds but with direct reference to reality for the audience's pleasure. Here he agrees with Plato that drama asks for emotional response from the audience, but he believed that the evoked emotions were not harmful. In the case of tragedy, pity and fear led to *catharsis*, to a clarification and purification of emotion, which he considered beneficial for the emotional stability of the spectators. He also thought, in contrast to Plato, that drama beneficially addresses the mind of the audience and that people could learn from such imitations. Moreover, the mimetic process can provide human beings with cognitive pleasures since we enjoy recognizing something that we already know.

As far as *mimesis* in dance is concerned Aristotle declares: 'The imitations of dancers imitate by rhythm itself without harmony; for they, too, through their figured rhythms, imitate both characters and passions and actions as well.'<sup>77</sup> So, according to Aristotle, the medium of dance is only body movement despite the fact that dancers used musical accompaniments as well, and a dancer represents human action (*praxis*) not by mime but by movements that are rhythmical and formally patterned; that is to say by dance steps and figures. Interestingly enough, Aristotle at this point seems to describe the form of *mimesis* that dancers actually perform. Apparently on the assumption that *mimesis* is a natural and typical manifestation of humanity Aristotle does not provide us with any further description of mimetic dance. What is more interesting for our present enquiry is that Plato and Aristotle considered dance and music as subservient to the purposes of representation. They did not regard them as separate art

---

<sup>77</sup> *Poetics*, 1447a 26-28.



forms, but as supplements to the dramatic art. They were parts of drama and they were supposed to serve its imitative purposes.

From the above, we can reach the conclusion that for Plato and Aristotle *mimesis* was at least a necessary condition for art. Something is a work of art only if it is an imitation (for Plato) or a representation (for Aristotle) of something else. Nothing is a work of art unless it is an imitation/representation. Of course this theory seems untenable today. Consider, for example, abstract painting and modern dance. It might be true that in the latter one can find mimetic elements - movements or movement sequences that imitate everyday life activities - but imitation is by no means its single characteristic. Furthermore, the theory of art as simply imitation fails to be fully comprehensive, as a vast amount of what we consider to be art does not satisfy the necessary Platonic and Aristotelian requirement that anything that is art must be imitative. The theory is too exclusive and it has far too many exceptions.<sup>78</sup>

In retrospective support of Plato and Aristotle one could argue that art in their age was imitative. When they went to the theatre, for example, or looked at a marble statue, they were confronted with imitations of heroes, gods, persons and actions. So, the imitative theory of art seemed plausible judged by the artistic experiences that were available to them and coincides perfectly with the works of art that were produced at the time.

### **3.2.2. More Recent Approaches to the Theory of Art as Imitation**

The plausibility of this theory influenced Western aesthetic tradition for centuries and became particularly strong in the eighteenth century. Throughout much of the seventeenth and

---

<sup>78</sup> We will see in the following sections how a representational theory of art could take us slightly further on from an imitative one.

eighteenth centuries, the concept of *mimesis* is restricted to the imitation of nature, or, even better, an idealized nature. Aristotle is the main point of reference - in the eighteenth century art was defined in terms of the Aristotelian notion of imitation. Charles Batteaux<sup>79</sup> characteristically wrote, 'We shall define painting, sculpture and dance as the imitation of beautiful nature conveyed through colours, through relief and through attitudes. And music and poetry are the imitation of beautiful nature conveyed through sound or through measured discourse.'<sup>80</sup> For Batteaux a practice is characterized as a fine art if it meets the necessary condition of being imitative.<sup>81</sup>

No matter how limited this account of art appears to us today, the theory was largely accepted. As far as dance is concerned, it was suggested that theatrical dance should become imitative in accordance with Aristotle's philosophy, in order to be accepted as one of the fine arts. This resulted in the *ballet d'action*, which was dominant during the nineteenth century. The desirability of the imitation of beautiful nature did not hold only for dance, of course, but for the other arts as well.<sup>82</sup> As a consequence the theory described fairly closely the art of the time, since in order for their works to be considered art, the artists of the nineteenth century tried to comply with the commands of the theory.<sup>83</sup> The theory was still influential at the beginning of the twentieth century when much abstract painting was refused the characterization 'art' because it did not represent anything.

---

<sup>79</sup> Charles Batteaux, 1746, *Les Beaux Arts R—duits ↔ un Même Principe* (Paris : Saillart et Nyon, 1746).

<sup>80</sup> As quoted in Noël Carroll's *Philosophy of Art – A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999) p.22.

<sup>81</sup> Although Batteaux's account can be plausibly described as Aristotelian, the essence of the two accounts is very different. The differences are clearly presented by Sparshott, 1988: 'Aristotle presents dance mimesis as something dancers do, without saying that their art is itself one of mimesis. Batteaux presents the art of dance as included within the scope of imitation, any dance that is not mimetic being an abuse of art. Most important of all, Batteaux thinks of the medium of dance as significant movement, feigned and idealized; Aristotle says the medium is movement subjected to figure and rhythm.' (p.148.)

<sup>82</sup> It was similarly argued that music should imitate beautiful sounds of nature such as birdsong and that painting should try to imitate the appearance of things as closely as possible.

<sup>83</sup> Witness Turner's paintings or Beethoven's music.

However by then visual art in particular begins to take a different direction. Painting, for instance, no longer aims to copy how things look. Expressionism makes its appearance and emphasizes the importance of the expression of the feelings of the artist through the works,<sup>84</sup> and Cubism and Minimalism depart even further from the depiction of nature and natural objects. These movements manifestly questioned the imitation theory of art by showing that something can be art without being an imitation - the examples of non-imitative works of art are legion - and raised doubts for the general validity of the theory. Post-modern dance provides us with an interesting example. By focusing on movement for its own sake, it draws our attention to various dance forms, including ballet, which do not imitate any activity, but explore the possibilities of bodily movement.

Of course there are cases of art that involve some copying, namely mime.<sup>85</sup> But copies are not always regarded with approval. We do not consider forgeries to be works of art. Most importantly the account of art as imitation misses out in terms of creative originality, which we consider one of the fundamental characteristics of an artwork. There are two ways that one can approach this idea of art as imitation: the one is simply to deny that such close resemblances of the world can be produced, and the other is to allow that they can be, but deny that representational art does that.

Moreover, the supporters of the first approach deny that a world pre-exists and we passively perceive it; instead we create the world that exists. The stimuli that we receive from the outside world are being interpreted according to our expectations, memories, individual

---

<sup>84</sup> The theory of art as expression is discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>85</sup> An interesting example is given here by Colin Lyas. 'The copying model suggests that a painter stands before something and then copies what is seen, looking from the one to the other to check the match. That view presupposes that there is some way of identifying the world being copied or represented independently of the act of copying or representing it.' Colin Lyas, *Aesthetics, Fundamentals of Philosophy*, ed. John Shand, (London: UCL Press, 1997) p.40.

psychologies and our cultural backgrounds. So for example painters draw the world according to their personal and cultural backgrounds and as a result there is no right or wrong way of drawing how things look, but only different ways that different people, with different backgrounds draw the same things. Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art* supports this view.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.2.3. Representation Versus Imitation

Confronted with the above difficulties and objections the supporters of the theory of art as imitation thought of replacing imitation with representation. And by saying representation, we mean that something is intended to signify something else and is as such recognized by the audience. The relation between the two notions can be described as follows: Imitation is a form, a sub-category of representation, while representation is not always imitation. The notion of representation is broader, since something can stand for something else without looking exactly like it.

Thus the 'imitation transformed into representation' theory of art acquires a broader scope and can include more examples of art that were previously excluded. But arguably it still remains too exclusive, since much art is not representational. According to the representational theory  $x$  is a representation of  $y$ , where the latter can be an object, a person, an event or an action, if and only if somebody (the artist) intends that  $x$  (a painting) to stand for  $y$  (a flower) and the audience realizes that  $x$  stands for  $y$ .

---

<sup>86</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (London, Oxford University Press, 1969).



### 3.2.4. The Neo-Representational Theory of Art

The supporters of the imitation/representational theory of art came up with another variation of the theory that is known as the neo-representational theory of art. This makes a weaker claim in an attempt to provide us with a more general theory of art. According to this theory, *x* is a work of art only if it is about something, that is to say that *x* must have a subject, about which it makes a remark, a comment, expresses some observation. In other words a work of art necessarily possesses a semantic content.

The main advantage of this variation of the representational theory is that it managed to account for Dadaist art, namely for the genre of modern art that is called readymade or found object.<sup>87</sup> Take for example *The Fountain*, by Marcel Duchamp. The work in question is an ordinary urinal that came from the factory and Duchamp did not make it but simply found it. That is why such works were called readymades or found objects. Although some critics still object to their being classed as works of art, let us assume for the sake of the argument that found objects are artworks. But if *The Fountain* is an artwork, why are not other similar ordinary urinals? How are we to discern any difference between Duchamp's urinal and any other urinal?

The supporter of the neo-representational theory would suggest at this point that Duchamp's readymade is about something, has a subject, while the ordinary, similar, everyday life object has not. We do not stand in front of ordinary urinals contemplating their meaning, but we do that with Duchamp's found objects. So one can claim that Duchamp's *Fountain* is about the nature of art and that the artist wants to suggest that works of art need not necessarily be

---

<sup>87</sup> The following examples are taken from Carroll, 1999, p.27.



created. It is certainly a possible explanation/interpretation. Ordinary objects, on the contrary, do not have any semantic content; they do not need to be interpreted – at least not by an aesthetician. As a consequence our attitude towards a readymade and its everyday-life counterpart is different. The notion of context is being introduced at this point in our discussion of art and how it is to be understood and appreciated.<sup>88</sup>

We can accept at this point that the neo-representational theory provides us with a satisfactory account of some works of modern art, something that the two previous theories failed to do. But at the same time it suggests that semantic content is a sufficient condition of works of art. Clearly this is not the case, since there are many other things that are not works of art which nevertheless are about something, they undoubtedly have a subject: advertisements, for example.<sup>89</sup> So semantic content is not unique to artworks. But still, does every artwork possess it nevertheless?

The notion of interpretation is introduced by the neo-representationalist. It seems to the neo-representationalist that all works of art are open to interpretation and when something requires interpretation, it follows that it must be about something, it must have a meaning, a semantic content. So the interpretation is the specification of that content. If something needs interpretation it must be about something, otherwise why would it require an interpretation to begin with? Consequently the argument goes as follows: All works of art require interpretations. If something requires interpretation, then it must be about something. Therefore, all works of art are about something.

---

<sup>88</sup> See the general discussion on context in Chapter 1 (Introduction). The importance of the role of context in our discussion about dance will emerge through the exploration of all the aesthetic theories presented in the thesis.

<sup>89</sup> However, one could always argue that some advertisements are works of art as well.

The above argument seems like a strong argument in favour of the neo-representational theory of art. The fact that it is logically valid though, does not necessarily mean that its conclusion is also true. Are both premises of the argument true? The second premise stems from the definition of interpretation and seems plausible. Is the first premise, that all works of art require interpretation, satisfactory? This appears disputable. Consider the example of contemporary artists who create works of art aiming to challenge interpretation or be meaningless on purpose in order to blur the distinction between works of art and real things. This might be a way of approaching some readymades.

However, neo-representationalists can argue that these examples work in their favour, confirming their account. Works of art of this sort have a semantic content; they make a statement about the nature of art, suggesting that artworks are actually no different from real things. At the same time these works of art are not like real things since they have semantic content while real things do not.<sup>90</sup> Even if we disagree with the point that the artist is trying to make, this does not constitute an argument against the semantic content of a work of art, which is open to interpretation. It seems then that avant-garde works of art do not create a problem for the neo-representational theory.

The neo-representational theory is more powerful than the imitation or representational theory because it is more encompassing than the other two, but is it encompassing enough? Are we really convinced with the way that the theory deals with the variety of counter-examples from contemporary art?

---

<sup>90</sup> Noël Carroll's comment on the above issue is: 'An artist cannot make an artwork whose point is that artworks are real things by simply making a real thing, since by saying something (by making a point) the piece is already more than a mute, meaningless real thing – because it has aboutness and warrants an interpretation. Real things don't exemplify the property of real-thingness, though they possess it; something designed to exemplify real-thingness in order to make a theoretical point obviously has semantic content, semantic content of the sort that art critics will explicate by pointing to the artist's commitment to showing that artworks are ultimately real things.' Carroll, 1999, p.30.

Consider the example of a piece of pure orchestral music, which is characterized as melancholic. Is that what it is about? Is the subject of the musical piece melancholy? It might possess the property of melancholy, but does this also mean that it is about that same property? Mere possession of a property hardly ever counts as the semantic content of a work of art. Furthermore, to say that a piece of music is melancholic is not a powerful interpretation, if indeed it is an interpretation at all. It is more of a description of a property of the work.

Decorative art is another counter-example to the neo-representational theory. In support of the theory one could argue that even what appears to be mere decoration, occurs in a cultural context where it has perhaps a religious or ritual significance and, therefore, a semantic content. But is this always the case for all decorative art? There are occasions when we find a pattern simply eye-catching and pleasant. Some works of art are simply beautiful, as Kant suggested.<sup>91</sup> These works do not require interpretation. They are neither about beauty in general nor about the particular beauty they possess; they are simply beautiful. This sort of art is not about anything; it is merely pleasing.

The interesting question as far as the notion of representation in general is concerned, is whether we can get rid of representation altogether. What would we lose if we lost representation from art? As Colin Lyas points out, 'People seem driven to festoon walls, trains and bridges with representational graffiti. There is an insatiable drive to represent the world, an insatiable wish to view those representations, and a propensity fervently to cherish those gifted as representers.'<sup>92</sup>

It is obvious that representation plays an important role in any account of art and is one of the main aspects of a great number of works of art, regardless of the inadequacy of the

---

<sup>91</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>92</sup> Lyas, 1997, p.38.

various representational theories. Visual art is the art that is most closely related to representation/imitation. But the approaches to pictorial representation and the different types of pictorial representation will not be discussed here.

We turn now to explore how the above-discussed theories can contribute to an understanding of the art of dance and how the notion of mimesis can be related to dance.

### **3.3. Dance and/as Mimesis**

From this discussion on mimesis we conclude that the power of mimesis lies in the images it creates. Images have, of course, a material existence, but what they represent is not always an integral part of empirical reality. Images force a connection between the person and empirical reality, but they retain their aspect of illusion, fiction and deception. But how can dance fit into this picture?

In this section we are concerned with how the notion of mimesis is related to dance without referring to particular dance genres.<sup>93</sup> What does it mean for a dance to be mimetic? <sup>94</sup> Are all dances mimetic? We say that a dance is mimetic when the movements of the dance belong to actions other than dancing and do so mainly by simulation, or by quotation, or by re-enactment or by referring in some way.

Francis Sparshott states that there are six ways in which dance can be mimetic. Firstly, the dancer can perform an action as in everyday life but execute it as a dance, by putting it in the context of a dance. Secondly, she can perform a movement in an ordinary way and

---

<sup>93</sup> The particular dance genres are discussed in relation to mimesis in the following section.

<sup>94</sup> It should be noted that the word 'mimetic' does not mean having the nature of mime. Dance is a practice distinct from mime.



incorporate it in a dance. She performs it as part of a dance. Thirdly, a dancer can mime by executing an action in a dance-like way so that the audience will understand the meaning of the action. Fourthly, a movement can be performed neither in an ordinary way nor in a special way as in the previous category, but in a way that is stylistically subordinated to the dance. The particular movement/ series of movement is then a distinguishable entity but form(s) a part of the dance. Fifthly, the dancer can mime an action in such a way that each of its components will be executed as dance movements. Finally, we have the case of a recognizable dance equivalent of an ordinary action.<sup>95</sup>

No matter which of the above ways the choreographer chooses to use in her dance, what is important is to succeed in communicating with the audience. 'Mimesis lies in the imparting of a resemblance or reference by a creator or performer and its recognition by a public. Normal or successful mimesis takes place when the dance-makers intend a reference of some sort and the appropriate audience recognizes just the intended reference in just the intended way.'<sup>96</sup> Of course there are many ways in which the representation can go wrong, when the intention of the creator is misunderstood or not understood at all by the audience. When the intended message fails to be communicated either the choreographers can be held responsible for the failure, or the unqualified audience, or both.

Representations in dance also vary in the degree of recognizability. On the one hand there are representations that are recognizable immediately; one understands straight away what the dancer imitates. Sometimes the spectator may be able to realize that a representation is taking place without being able to figure out what it stands for. There are also cases of representation that are intelligible only when one knows in advance that mimesis is taking

---

<sup>95</sup> Sparshott, 1995, pp.71-2.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, pp.72-3.

place and, moreover, what it is that the dance supposedly represents. In this last case, there are two further possibilities: one sees the resemblance and sees also the way it is carried out by decoding the mimetic elements, or one merely sees the resemblance without being able to discern the way it is represented.

A dance can represent a vast number of entities or events, whose mode of representation varies accordingly. That is to say the relation between the subject of mimesis and its object can take the following modes: impersonation, mimicry, representation, presentation, transformation, transfiguration and many more. So mimesis can be used in a variety of ways as a medium for the creation of the symbolic space of a dance. It contributes to the transformation of the physical space into symbolic space, and *vice versa* and as a consequence contributes to the communication between the choreographer/dancers and the audience.

There is a view, held mainly by contemporary choreographers and dance critics, that mimetic dance is not pure dance. For them pure or real dance is dance where there is no reference to any kind of representation. But are there reasons for thinking that abstract or nonrepresentational dance is better, or more authentic, than mimetic dance? Do the mimetic elements of a dance reduce its autonomy or its quality? And finally, can we strip from dance every mimetic element? The debate between abstract and representational dance in terms of their respective artistic qualities is similar to the debate over abstract and representational painting. Supporters of representation have not succeeded in showing that abstract art is meaningless or trivial and the supporters of abstraction have not managed to diminish the value of pictorial meaning. Why, then, cannot we say the same about dance?

The case of dance differs from painting in the sense that when one learns to draw, one learns how to represent things and people on a piece of paper, whereas representational dance is not the norm. When most people learn to dance, they learn to execute abstract dance movements which they then combine. There are two levels of mimesis in relation to dance movements: the first level, when dance movements are identical to everyday life movements and the second level when the movements are not themselves mimetic of a particular action but contribute to the representation of a situation in a dance. So, in the case of dance the relation between the actual everyday life movement and the dance movement that represents it is not straightforward.

In the previous sections it was suggested that in order for a work of art to be representational it must have a semantic content, it should be 'about' something. What, then, of abstract dances danced for their own sake? These dances seem to lack referential meaning. It might be the case that they refer to the nature of movement, 'they may be thought to refer to the kind of movement they exemplify – otherwise there could not be a dance, there would be nothing that was identifiable and hence in principle repeatable.'<sup>97</sup> Nelson Goodman appears to agree with this view when he claims that

some elements of the dance are primarily denotative. [...] But other movements, especially in the modern dance, primarily exemplify rather than denote. What they exemplify, however, are not standard or familiar activities, but rather rhythms and dynamic shapes. [...] To regard these movements as illustrating verbal descriptions would of course be absurd; seldom can the just wording be found. Rather, the label a movement exemplifies may be itself.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.67.

<sup>98</sup> Goodman, 1969, pp.64-5.

But can we say that all movements or movement sequences are meaningful? The answer to this question is highly problematic. Some movements are about something, have a semantic content no matter whether this is intelligible to us or not. At the same time we cannot say with certainty that all movements are meaningful. There might be movements performed as an intermediary between two meaningful movements, a transitory movement. Mary Wigman has said that one develops a meaningful dance sequence by proceeding from spontaneous and unrepeatable movements to proper dance movements by training and perfecting the body as an instrument and by developing a system of movements with its own principles.<sup>99</sup>

In terms of the semantic meaning of a work, one can also argue for the view that every work refers to the tradition in which it was created and from which it derives its meaning. There are two extreme views that one can hold in this case. On the one hand, a work may be about the tradition, or a part of it. On the other hand, a work may simply have a place in a tradition from which it derives meaning, without referring to it at all. Of course, there is also the less extreme case where a work may be consciously related to a tradition, towards which it adopts an attitude, without that attitude being the central meaning of the work.

If we are then to accept that every dance is meaningful in the sense that it must refer to a tradition that gives it a distinct meaning, why not say that every work is mimetic by referring to itself? But this will destroy the concept of mimesis, which is that the form of a work depends for its intelligibility on something other than itself, to which it refers.

So, to characterize a dance as mimetic is a matter of degree. There are mimetic elements in the majority of dances, but dances are not exclusively comprised of these elements. Even more often the distinction between the mimetic and the formal aspects of

---

<sup>99</sup> That is why she talked about dance as a system of communication, as a language of movement, in her autobiographical book *The Language of Dance* (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1966).



dance is difficult to draw.<sup>100</sup> Sparshott suggests that although there is no point in asking whether mimetic or non-mimetic dance is superior 'it is, however, tempting to assign inherent superiority to those dances in which the distinction between the mimetic and the formal aspects is hardest to make: in which the mimetic aspects are so thoroughly danced that there is nothing in them in which the mimetic quality takes on an appearance that is at variance with or even independent of characteristics that appear to respond to purely formal exigencies.'<sup>101</sup>

Some of the above considerations will be made more intelligible through the exploration of the relation between the different dance genres and mimesis that follows.

### 3.4. The Dances and Mimesis

In this section we discuss to what extent our set examples of the different dance genres can be characterized as mimetic. Whether, in other words, mimetic elements can be found in some or all of them and how, if at all, the abstract notion of mimesis has influenced the movement sequences. As before, the examples are presented in chronological order.

Romantic ballet has a story, a plot, which is, in the majority of cases, known to the audience. The choreographer attempts to communicate with movements the narrative and, at same time, to create an imaginary world, an illusion. This fits perfectly with what *mimesis* has traditionally been thought to be doing. The dancers are asked firstly to imitate the attitudes and actions of the different characters in the story and secondly to contribute to the representation of the mythical world, in which the story takes place. As a consequence, romantic ballet is

---

<sup>100</sup> These remarks will be made more obvious in the following section where we consider the extent to which the particular dances are mimetic.

<sup>101</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.69.

characterized as highly mimetic. In this case, though, the abstract idea of mimesis is not the one being communicated. Mimesis is used as a medium for the telling of a story and the creation of the illusion.

The same can be said for classical ballet. There is, again, a set story that is being told through movement and the dancers are asked to represent the characters they play. An illusion is also created, an illusion of airiness and grace characteristic not of human beings but of fairy creatures. Both romantic ballet and classical ballet are close to drama, as Aristotle perceived it. The abstract idea of mimesis is not one of the preoccupations of the classical choreographers, but simply the medium that contributes to the communication of the abstract ideas of beauty and grace. Having in mind the examples of romantic and classical ballet, some dance critics made the claim that mimetic dances are of lower quality than other dances which are not so apparently mimetic. If we are to follow their point of view, ballet, in general, is reduced to mere storytelling in movement (which is indeed a common accusation against ballet).

The mimetic elements become fewer in the case of neoclassical ballet. The element of playacting is often removed, since there is not always a story to be told: the dancers do not have particular characters to represent. Attention is given to the human body and its abilities. Isolated mimetic gestures do still exist (indeed, as will be shown, they never cease to exist). Consider the example of hand waving, incorporated in many dances as an indication of greeting. In this case the dancer is imitating an everyday life movement used to salute another person. If we are to accept that movements like that just described are mimetic, then every dance is mimetic to a certain degree, which varies according to the number of such mimetic

gestures incorporated in a dance. Yet surely by considering mimesis on such a minimum scale, we are missing the whole point of the abstract notion of mimesis.

Isadora Duncan's creations are attempts to represent natural beauty. Her dances seem to manifest the ideas of eighteenth century aestheticians.<sup>102</sup> Once again mimesis is used for the communication of another abstract idea, that of natural beauty or naturalism. Duncan's dances are 'made' of natural movements, movements that do not explore or stress the body's abilities but they are still sophisticated enough not to be confused with everyday life movement.<sup>103</sup>

Rudolf Laban, who took the idea of naturalism slightly further, introduces everyday life movement into his dances. Mimesis does not concern him either. Mimetic elements can be found in his dances to the same extent that everyday life movements are mimetic. Laban is preoccupied with how to make movement more expressive and mimesis is not of much help to that.

Mimesis is not a central concern for Mary Wigman either. She is, rather, concerned with achieving pure movement in dance, disengaged from any external reference, as a way of arguing for the autonomy of dance and its potential role as a system of communication of ideas. Having said that, in *Witch Dance*, one of Wigman's most characteristic works, she plays a witch wearing a mask that distorted her own facial features. But although mimetic elements in her dances are kept to a minimum she could not avoid representation altogether.

Having perhaps realized that movement cannot be entirely stripped of representational qualities Martha Graham uses the mimetic qualities of movement to create her desired

---

<sup>102</sup> See Section 3.2.2, More Recent Approaches to Art as Imitation.

<sup>103</sup> An interesting enquiry would be to explore whether Duncan was aware of Jean-Georges Noverre's views on dance. See Section 3.5 below.

background. Mimesis is used to set up the framework in which abstract ideas are communicated. In *Appalachian Spring*, everything reminds us of a wedding taking place on the American Frontier but the dance is neither a ceremony nor a party. Graham creates an illusion, but not for its own sake, as was the case with romantic and classical ballet. The whole representation stands for the strange and abstracted idea of the American pioneer spirit. Representation is used as a metaphor, as a way of communicating human feelings.

By contrast, one would have to try very hard to find any kind of mimetic elements in Cunningham's work. Using Dadaist techniques to make decisions about his creations, he came closer than anyone else to abstraction and to purity of formal qualities. The same can be said of Yvonne Rainer, who tried hard to make her dances manifestos of the importance of the formal elements of dance and purity of movement.

Finally, we go from one extreme to the other, from the absence of mimesis to its distortion, a tradition that started with Graham. Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater* is closer to the ancient Greek tragedies than any other dance genre. Human relationships, especially those between men and women, are explored through a surreal representation of contemporary social reality. There is no plot nor a conventional sense of progression. The Aristotelian catharsis is achieved here through the absurd and ridiculous social situations presented. Nor does Bausch create illusions. She creates a distorted representation of reality in order to communicate her messages. There is a plethora of mimetic elements in her dances. Her dancers imitate the social behaviour of ordinary human beings but in a surreal way. Bausch takes mimesis to its extremes. Mimesis contributed to her overall project, blurring the borders between dance and the body language of everyday life, and exploring the nature of both dance and ordinary movements and their connotations.



From this discussion of how mimesis appears in the different dance genres, two points should be made in relation to mimesis: Firstly, the symbolic significance of mimesis was not the main preoccupation of any of the choreographers and genres that concern us here, but was simply used as a medium for the communication of other abstract notions. If mimesis were an end in itself, we would not be talking about dance but pantomime. In the case of pantomime, the success of the performance depends on how unmistakably the performer imitates a situation so the spectators can understand it. The closer to reality the more successful the imitation; a situation that does not apply to dance. Secondly, it is almost impossible to disengage human movement from any sort of mimetic aspect. The human body has always been used to produce and express similarities in such things as dance, gesture, language and imagination. So we have to accept that to a certain extent every dance incorporates mimetic elements.

We now turn to the case of Jean-Georges Noverre who provided a theoretical background in support of mimetic elements in dance.

### **3.5. The Case of Jean-Georges Noverre**

In dance literature the main supporter<sup>104</sup> of the representational theory is the great eighteenth-century choreographer and theorist Jean-Georges Noverre, who claimed that dance is, or rather should be, 'a faithful likeness of beautiful nature'.<sup>105</sup> This view reveals his

---

<sup>104</sup> Another supporter of the idea is John Weaver. His ideas are presented in *An Essay towards a History of Dancing*, London: J.Tonson, 1792, reprinted in facsimile in Richard Ralph, *The Life and Works of John Weaver*, (London: Dance Books, 1985). Both Noverre and Weaver relied on Aristotle's authority in support of their views on imitation.

<sup>105</sup> All the quotations by Noverre are from his *Letters on Dancing and Ballets*, printed in Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen eds, *What is Dance?*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) pp.10-15. It should also be noted

rejection of the empty acrobatics of dance in his time in favour of a more accurate and even 'pantomimic' representation of nature. What Jean-Georges Noverre did was to reject empty spectacle and meaningless virtuosity in dance, while at the same time he wanted to emphasize the beauty that can be found in more natural sequences of movement. According to him imitation is an integral, if not essential, feature of dance.

At the beginning of his first letter, Noverre expresses the view that Corneille, Racine, Raphael and Michelangelo owe their reputation to 'the accuracy of representation' that characterized their works and the reason why the names of leading *maîtres de ballet* are not included in this list of great artists is their own fault.

Before providing us with the reason for the above remark he gives a detailed description/definition of ballet: 'A ballet is a picture, or rather a series of pictures connected one with the other by the plot which provides the theme of the ballet; the stage is, as it were, the canvas on which the composer expresses his ideas; the choice of the music, scenery and costumes are his colours; the composer is the painter.' It is clear from the very first sentence that Noverre is a representationalist. The analogy of ballet with painting shows that explicitly.<sup>106</sup>

He continues to suggest that the reason the *maîtres de ballet* are not valued in the same way as other artists is because their works are not 'endowed [by nature] with passionate enthusiasm which is the soul of all imitative arts.' Their works as a consequence 'endure only for a moment and are forgotten almost as soon as the impressions they have produced.'

Noverre claims that the art of dance, and particularly ballet, is still in its infancy because 'its effects have been limited, like those of fireworks simply designed to gratify the

---

that one cannot be clear whether Noverre's account as a whole is descriptive or normative as there is confusion in his writings between *is* and *should be*.

<sup>106</sup> The question that arises here is whether all pictures are representations.

eyes.' Nevertheless he believes that ballet can inspire, move and captivate the spectator 'by the charm of its interest and illusion. No one has suspected its power of speaking to the heart.' The under-valuation of ballet is the fault of the choreographers who have forgotten that dance is an imitative art. Noverre encourages them to derive inspiration from the pictures of great painters in order to get in touch with nature and avoid repeating the same conventional patterns of step and movements.<sup>107</sup> The symmetrical figures should be used only as a supplementary. Nature should reign in *scènes d'action* of a ballet.

That is what I term a *scène d'action*, where the dance should speak with fire and energy; where symmetrical and formal figures cannot be employed without transgressing truth and shocking probability, without enfeebling the action and chilling the interest. There, I say, is a scene which should offer a ravishing disorder, and where the composer's art should not appear except to embellish nature.

The aim for a choreographer must be to become 'both a faithful imitator and excellent painter.'

Noverre's views are interesting when we consider the historical period in which they were expressed and the purpose they served. They were also very influential, as is evident in writings by later scholars such as Selma-Jeanne Cohen.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, they fail to tell the whole story about the art of dance. Dance is not a purely imitative art and even in Noverre's writings the notion of expression is mentioned from time to time. We accept that dance has some mimetic elements and that there are certain dances that are more mimetic than others, but mimesis is not the only characteristic of dance, simply one of its components.<sup>109</sup> The

---

<sup>107</sup> There was a danger with Noverre's suggestions: they could be carried to extremes so that ballets would become mere pantomime.

<sup>108</sup> See her article 'Dance as an Art of Imitation', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 12(2) (December 1953): .232-36.

<sup>109</sup> This view is shared by Noël Carroll and Sally Banes as expressed in their paper 'Dance, Imitation and Representation' in Graham McFee ed., *Dance, Education and Philosophy*, Chelsea School Research Centre Edition, vol. 7 (Oxford: Meyer and MeyerSport, 1999a: 'And yet representation, and even imitation, is still a feature of *some* dances, even if it is not regarded as a necessary condition of *all* dances.' (p.13).

prominence of the mimetic elements in a dance does not say anything about the value of a dance and a dance should not be criticized solely on these grounds.

### 3.6. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we tried to give a working definition of the term mimesis in order to be able to relate it to the art of dance. Through the analysis of the different versions of the representational theory, from Plato and Aristotle to more contemporary approaches, it emerged that *mimesis* can be understood in two ways: firstly as imitation, as faithful likeness to objects and actions that occur in everyday life, which is the more narrow interpretation; and secondly as representation, which is a broader conception of the term, when something is intended to stand for something else and is recognized by the receivers as such.

In the particular case of ballet and modern dance we can identify accordingly two different levels of *mimesis*: On a first level the dancers faithfully imitate representational movements and actions from everyday life. Movements stand for words and a story is being told in movements instead of words. There is a direct connection between the specific movements and the narrative. No particular interpretation is required from the viewers in order to understand what takes place in front of them. In this case *mimesis* is a part of language and this constitutes the lower level of *mimesis*. On a second level, more complicated and perhaps more intriguing, the dancers do not imitate everyday movements and actions but with their dance they represent a situation. There is not a straightforward connection between the movements of the dancers and what they are trying to communicate and, as a consequence, a considerable interpretation is required from the spectators. In this case *mimesis* is part of the



message that the choreographer/dancers want to communicate to the audience and this constitutes a higher level of mimesis. Movements here are not imitations of actions but representations of the symbolic space. They create the symbolic space of the particular dance and contribute to the communication of the choreographer's ideas to the audience.

From this analysis of the specific examples of dance genres we realize that every dance is to a certain extent mimetic. The earlier examples demonstrate more vividly the first level of mimesis while the more contemporary ones manifest a greater degree of abstraction. If we turn now to the initial questions of whether mimesis can help us distinguish dance from gymnastics and dance movement from everyday life movement, we recognize that despite the fact that some mimetic elements can be found in almost every dance, in the ways just presented, they are rarely characteristic of a particular dance. If that were the case, then dance would be reduced to pantomime and would lose its identity.

In the specific distinction sought between dance and gymnastics, the notion of mimesis can be of some assistance, since there is no inherent reason for gymnastics to be mimetic. Gymnastic movements do not imitate or represent anything: they do not stand for words of a language, they do not tell a story, and they do not imitate actions of everyday life. Gymnastic movements are executed with the greatest possible accuracy to demonstrate the body's capabilities, and the aim of the executors of such movements is to achieve perfection to win competitions. There is little similarity between these movements and dance movements. Mimesis, then, differentiates dance from gymnastics.

On the other hand mimesis does not help us to differentiate dance from other kindred activities. As we have seen already, and especially in the discussion of the individual examples, there are many cases where dance imitates everyday life movements (first level of

mimesis) and in the majority of cases these movements are used with the same significance in dance as in everyday life, such as in the hand waving example. On a second level, though, mimetic dance movements are used as part of the symbolic space of a dance in a way that everyday movements are not; mainly because abstract notions are communicated through language in everyday life.

This last remark supports our suggestion that dance constitutes a form of language, not as sophisticated as verbal language, but at the same time more complicated than body or sign language. It has its own rules and codes that need to be known by both choreographers/dancers and the audience in order for the communication to be successful.

Thus, although there are mimetic elements in almost every dance, mimesis is not the only characteristic of dance.

In the next chapter we explore whether Immanuel Kant's notion of 'disinterested' beauty can provide us with a better account of the central features of dance.

## 4. Dance as Beauty

### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter we explore further whether and how aesthetic theories could be used to characterize dance, and, in particular, how the notion of beauty can be related to dance.<sup>110</sup> In order to achieve that, the next section of the chapter (4.2) attempts to provide an explanation/explication of the term 'beauty' by drawing attention to its relative character as well as by distinguishing it from the notion of 'grace' - always with reference to the art of dance. Kant's suggestion that judgments of taste are, if not objective, at least 'universally subjective' is presented as an antithesis to the view that beauty is subjective and relativist.

In Section 4.3 we discuss whether dance can or needs to be characterized as beautiful and to what extent the abstract notions of beauty and grace influence the symbolic space of the particular dances. We further explore whether the Kantian approach to beauty is manifested in the different dances and to what extent Kant could have made a case for dance to be considered as one of the arts by exploring the interesting relation that exists between beauty and art in general. An analysis of the relationship between symbolic space beauty and physical space beauty, which becomes evident from the discussion of the individual paradigms, follows.

We conclude by considering whether beauty - in general, not just Kantian beauty - provides us with satisfactory answers to the initial questions concerning the distinction between dance and everyday movement and between dance and gymnastics. Finally, we

---

<sup>110</sup> Refer back to the general discussion in Chapter 1, in particular to Sections 1.4 and 1.5.

investigate whether the notion of beauty can contribute to our understanding and explication of dance.

It should be noted that our aim in this chapter is twofold: firstly, to show that beauty, despite being often referred to in relation to dance and art in general, cannot constitute a single criterion for dance, and secondly, that Kant's account of aesthetic judgements cannot contribute to our understanding of dance. By no means do we attempt a presentation of Kant's aesthetics or any explicit criticism of it, we merely argue that general views on what dance is about are not congruent with Kant's account of judgments of taste.

## 4.2. Beauty and/or Grace

From an examination of writings on dance, it appears that beauty, as far as the art of dance is concerned, is closely related to grace. Sondra Horton Fraleigh encapsulates this view by claiming that 'Grace is another word for beauty in dance, and beauty is another word for the aesthetic.'<sup>111</sup> It might well be true that we characterize some dance performances, and especially ballet performances, as beautiful because of the graceful movements of the dancers, but this does not take us much further in the analysis. Horton Froleigh makes further attempts to define beauty within the realm of dance:

Beauty has been the historic ingredient of the aesthetic. But what does it mean? Its definition from classical philosophy until the eighteenth century revolved around issues of harmony and proportion to the golden mean, that the smaller part is to the larger what the larger is to the whole. The ratios could be mathematically calculated in architecture and in music, as demonstrated in the overtone series. We still use *beauty* as an aesthetic modifier, but we mean many things less quantifiable when we say it. Often we are expressing our pleasure in something,

---

<sup>111</sup> Sondra Horton Fraleigh, 'Witnessing the Frog Pont', in Sondra Horton Fraleigh and Penelope Hanstein eds, *Researching Dance – Evolving Modes of Inquiry* (London: Dance Books, 1999) p.199.



its expressive eloquence, its power to move us. The history of the term *beautiful* contains the history of aesthetics. We constantly invent new ways of applying it. Just as we evolve new understandings of grace – as we must – if it continues to have any meaning in dance.<sup>112</sup>

These considerations give us an insight into the difficulty, if not inability, to give an accurate characterization of beauty, just as with 'dance' itself.<sup>113</sup> If we were asked to explain to somebody what beauty is, we would often resort to giving examples of beautiful things as manifestations of what we call beauty. This process would not provide us with an exact definition of beauty; it would just give indications of what is commonly understood as beauty, or even less helpful, of what we personally consider as beautiful. It would appear that when we say something is beautiful we express a judgment and we do not attribute a quality to the particular thing.<sup>114</sup> One would then be tempted to think that as a consequence our aesthetic judgments cannot be but subjective and relative. Kant, of course, disagreed with this view and he suggested that, because the pleasure that we feel when we are presented with something beautiful is completely different from the pleasure we feel when we eat, for example, a chocolate cake, this should be an indication that the pleasure which derives from beauty is not purely subjective, because it does not derive solely from the cause of our pleasure. According to his view, to say that something is beautiful brings with it an expectation that others will share the same view, while to say that something is pleasing does not. He introduced the phrase 'subjective universality' in his attempt to systematize aesthetic judgments as he did with the other types of judgments. The term is, at least, paradoxical. But our aim is not to appraise

---

<sup>112</sup> Fraleigh, 1999a, p.203.

<sup>113</sup> See Section 1.1 'Some Remarks on Methodology'.

<sup>114</sup> To say that a thing is beautiful is not the same sort of assertion as saying that the thing is red. Redness is a property of that thing while beauty is not.

Kant's aesthetic theory in general but to adapt his view to dance and assess the success of this approach.

What can be derived from associating beauty with grace? The term graceful is commonly used as a characterization of movement. Graceful movements create in the spectator a feeling of pleasure and enjoyment and are characterized as beautiful. Yet graceful movements are beautiful, beautiful movements are not always graceful. Beauty is a broader term than grace and it is associated with other notions as well, such as those of harmony or symmetry. Beauty in dance, as we will see in the following sections, can also emerge from the meaning that the movement communicates, without the movement itself being beautiful.

Kant is an enduring influence on aesthetic thought and analysis. It might therefore be thought that his analysis of aesthetic judgment could provide a key to our understanding of dance, since much of the theoretical and critical discourse about dance is aesthetic. Yet as we shall see in this chapter, such a view is mistaken. In arguing this we shall first look at the conditions under which such a transcendental project might succeed and whether these conditions are satisfied not only in the case of dance, but more generally. We shall further, by examining the coherence of a transcendental approach to the aesthetics of the different dance genres, demonstrate that the chance of such a project yielding useful and important insights is small.

By way of introducing a discussion of a transcendental analysis of aesthetic judgment it is instructive to look at Kant's similar approach to scientific judgment, since at an earlier historical epoch, Kant's analysis was not so much rebutted as rendered inapplicable.

### 4.2.1 The Collapse of Transcendental Arguments in Science

In his analysis of scientific perception and judgment one of the driving considerations was the exemplary accuracy and descriptive power of Newton's mechanics. This elegant theory, as applied to astronomical phenomena, was many orders of magnitude more accurate, coherent and comprehensive than any other scientific theory of Kant's time. As is well known, Kant argued that these features of Newtonian theory were a consequence of the special status of the Euclidean geometry used in the theory and the similar status accorded the causal powers of the governing forces. By use of transcendental arguments Kant demonstrated the necessary truth (although not the analyticity) of these elements of the theory by showing that they were part of the cognitive apparatus brought by the mind in observation and theorizing, rather than 'mere' empirical truths. Yet within a short time in the case of Euclidean geometry<sup>115</sup>, and in the twentieth century in the case of cause<sup>116</sup>, Kant's arguments were abandoned because his conclusions were incompatible with acceptable interpretations of experiments and observations. Physicists and mathematicians did not, on the whole undertake a rebuttal of Kant's arguments – they merely ignored them. Twentieth century work in the philosophy of science by, for example Reichenbach<sup>117</sup>, Ellis<sup>118</sup>, Kuhn<sup>119</sup> and Lakatos<sup>120</sup>, helps demonstrate how Kant misunderstood the status of these elements of scientific inquiry and thus why his

---

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Hans Reichenbach, *The Philosophy of Space and Time* (New York and London: Dover, 1957).

<sup>116</sup> For a discussion see Jeffrey Bub, 'The Philosophy of Quantum Mechanics', *Brit.J.Phil.Sci.*, **40** (1989), 191-212.

<sup>117</sup> Hans Reichenbach, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

<sup>118</sup> Brian Ellis, *Basic Concepts of Measurement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

<sup>119</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

<sup>120</sup> Imre Lakatos, 'The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes', in Imre Lakatos, *Philosophical Papers*, vol.1, ed. by J Worrall and G. Currie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) pp.8-101.

general analysis cannot be sustained. Of course some neo-Kantians then restricted Kant's analysis to phenomenological or psychological domains; we shall return to this issue shortly.

The reason why natural scientists thought it unnecessary to rebut Kant's arguments, merely denying his conclusions, is in part because the conditions for Kant's success had vanished. This is the issue which is relevant to the aesthetics of dance. In the case of geometry the emergence, first as pieces of pure mathematics, then later as components of alternative physical theories of so-called non-Euclidean geometries forced on physicists the realization that which geometry should be attributed to space was a matter of empirical investigation - though by no means of direct observation. In short, the uniqueness of (Euclidean) geometry was a precondition for the success for Kant's ingenious approach. Once this uniqueness had vanished, and a choice between geometries had to be made, the inadequacies of the transcendental method were exposed and some version of the hypothetico-deductive method was almost universally accepted by those investigating seriously the physical world.

A similar fate met the notion of cause. From its ubiquitous appearance in classical mechanics through increasingly dubious appearances in thermodynamics to its disappearance in quantum theory the transcendental nature of cause has vanished. It is, at best now, an approximate concept only applicable to large-scale phenomena under certain conditions. The existence of causal connections in the physical world is not guaranteed by transcendental arguments but rather by deep physical and mathematical arguments which attempt to grapple with peculiar experimental phenomena. Again one would only argue transcendentially for concepts of this sort if there were a consensus that the concept was an essential part of an enduring theory. Of course it would always be open to a neo-Kantian to derive



transcendentally new concepts to underpin these new theories. But the attractiveness of such a project is minimal amongst theoreticians partly for historical and partly methodological reasons – the structure of scientific theories is different, and seen as different from those of Kant's day. But more importantly, at least in the natural sciences, there are no longer fundamental, stable concepts and ideas whose status is obviously different from empirically founded concepts. Thus the need for transcendental argumentation has disappeared.

As observed earlier, some neo-Kantians have withdrawn their claims in the natural sciences and promote the project in perception and cognition. Jean Piaget is one such individual. But in Piaget's case the argument has changed radically. He recognizes, with Kant, that observation requires some 'prior' framework. In the initial stages of an individual's development this is provided by motor skills, then develops through more abstract intellectual capacities to reach (apparently only in some individuals) its highest form as logic. But there is an important modification in Piaget. The frameworks change and develop in response to external pressures of the observational environment, and the changes are not always progressive, and are further influenced by teaching and other cultural influences. So there is no need to argue for particular forms of the framework. The forms and their succession are both governed by the environment of the individual and discovered experimentally by the psychologist. The relative ubiquity of inter-subjective similarity of frameworks is largely guaranteed as an empirical fact by the maturation of the individual in a closely controlled environment of parents, siblings and teachers. This convergence of frameworks needs only the general learning mechanisms which are common across cultures and extend from 'the amoeba to the nuclear physicist', to quote Piaget.<sup>121</sup> Unlike many of his followers - and detractors - in

---

<sup>121</sup> Jean Piaget, *Genetic Epistemology* (London and New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

developmental psychology, he did not regard this work as a mere descriptive study of individual development but as 'genetic epistemology' – a successor to Kant's project, inspired by Kant but differing in respects which are crucial for our analysis of the aesthetics of dance. But even as Piaget's work was taken forward, the eurocentric slant on the structure and content of knowledge was being abandoned. Anthropological/philosophical discussion abounded. For example, it was contended that the Azande tribe used a wholly different logic from ours, and there are numerous similar discussions about counting and other fundamental ideas.

In philosophical circles this division between the conceptual structure of knowledge and its empirically derived content has come under increasing criticism that is now widely accepted. Quine's<sup>122</sup> demolition of the analytic/synthetic distinction bears directly on contentions that some elements of our knowledge have a status so different as to demand a transcendental justification. Similarly, Davidson's<sup>123</sup> writings on the impossibility of 'conceptual schemes' point very much in the same direction. Indeed the attacks on the traditional view that epistemology is prior to empirical knowledge are also attacks on transcendentalism.

We have therefore seen in discussing the evolution and fate of neo-Kantian views of the structure of knowledge that they have fallen because the facts of the stability and ubiquity of central concepts are no longer true and thus, of course, not guaranteed. As we turn back to discuss our primary interest, aesthetic analysis, we observe that the expanding realization of intra-cultural and intercultural diversity in art in general and dance in particular is significant.

---

<sup>122</sup> Willard Van Orman Quine, *From A Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1953).

<sup>123</sup> David Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', *Proc. Am. Phil. Ass.*, 67 (1973): 5-20.

We argue that this lack of a stable base means that a detailed rebuttal of the Kantian analysis is, at least for our purposes, not required since the pre-conditions for transcendental arguments are not satisfied. This needs demonstration, and it is to this we now turn by discussing the notion of beauty in relation to the different dance genres. Later in the thesis (Chapter 7) we turn to the positive task of deriving a concept of dance which will make apparent the difficulties faced by the transcendental method, when there are no necessary or sufficient conditions for the proper application of the concept of 'dance'.

### **4.3. Beauty, Grace and the Dances**

In this section we discuss to what extent the particular set examples, which represent different dance genres, can be characterized as beautiful and whether and how the abstract notion of beauty is present in the dance. This exploration will help us outline more lucidly the relation between beauty and dance, the relation between the concepts and the extent to which beauty is part of the symbolic space of the dances. This will allow an assessment of the Kantian position to which we shall later return. We are conscious that Kant did not think that judgments of beauty were cognitive, because they are not judgments of character of the object itself. It might therefore seem that details of the different dance genres could not bear on Kant's analysis of beauty. But if on closer observation we were to reveal that the nature of beauty in dance was radically different in different genres we might conclude that Kant's analysis failed to account for our reactions to dance, and thus must be replaced with a more satisfactory theory. Further if Kant was unable to systematically distinguish beauty from grace in its different manifestations then his theory must also in this respect be counted as wanting.

Although Kant's theory was produced *a priori* and thus thought not to be assessed by consideration of actual agreements or disagreements on beauty, it would be a failure if it did not generally account for and reflect the manifold and subtle distinctions that we make in addressing the heterogeneous forms of dance. In short, Kant's analysis of the concepts involved will not succeed if the concepts fail to capture adequately the aesthetic qualities of dance.

The romantic ballet is considered one of the foremost examples of beauty in dance. The movements are harmonious and graceful. The preoccupation with their perfect execution and the faithful commitment to the strict ballet technique contribute to that. But it is not only the fact that the physical space of romantic ballet, namely the actual movements, are characterized as beautiful, it is also the symbolic space of romantic ballets that is closely related to beauty. Apart from the narrative that the choreographer attempts to communicate through movement, it seems that her creation and consequently her decisions as far as movements are concerned are influenced by the desire to communicate the abstract notions of grace and beauty. That is why the choreographer creates an imaginary world in romantic ballet, an illusion, as a way of manifesting the idea of beauty, grace and harmony.

Similar remarks can be made for classical ballet. Movement is graceful and beautiful, following the rules of traditional ballet technique, and the choreographer wants to create an illusion of airiness and fragility characteristic not of human beings but of fairy creatures, in her attempt to instantiate the notions of beauty and grace. These first two dances can be examples of what Kant characterizes as beautiful in his *Critique of Judgment* and particularly in the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. In the so-called 'First Moment' he reaches the conclusion that in order to call an object beautiful one must judge it to be the object of an entirely disinterested [ohne



ales Interesse] satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The pleasure that one gains from something beautiful differs, according to Kant, from other pleasures because it is not based on any interest and it is a disinterested and free satisfaction. The beautiful object does not gratify our senses nor does it serve a desired practical use or a moral requirement. Romantic and classical ballets seem to fit very appositely into this description.

With these two examples we can go even further and suggest that they also satisfy the two successive 'moments' of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*; namely the second that argues for 'subjective universality' of the judgments of taste and the third that is concerned with the form of 'purposiveness' and makes a case for the harmony in form that the beautiful demonstrates, which belies the harmony in our cognitive powers (imagination and understanding) in our reflection of the former. In other words, the form of the beauty of something does not reflect a definite purpose. The harmony is itself the pleasure we experience when we find something beautiful and does not serve any other subjective or objective purpose. This latter point presents us with an explanation of how Kant argued. By saying that something is beautiful we think that others should agree with us, which is not the case if we simply say that something is pleasing to us, since we may not share the 'interests' of others.

The classical and romantic ballets illustrate Kant's views by manifesting the 'universal subjectivity' of 'disinterested' beauty, something that is not the case for other dance genres. Even the narrative is used as a means for the better realization of the abstract ideas of beauty and harmony. It should be mentioned though that we disagree with the idea of subjective universality and Kant's attempt to systematize even the judgments of taste, since we are not convinced that the harmony of form can activate the free play of the cognitive powers in everybody, as Kant is suggesting, in exactly the same way. Kant claims that the presence or

even the contemplation of beautiful objects stimulates a 'free play' between our imagination and our understanding in harmony with one another, a harmony that we are aware of only through the feeling of pleasure. As a consequence the pleasure that we derive from something beautiful is dependent on judging the object, which activity is the free play of the cognitive powers, and the pleasure occurs when the two powers are felt to be in harmony, attaining 'the proportionate *Stimmung* which we require for all cognition.'<sup>124</sup> The aesthetic judgment then takes the form of a conceptual judgment, since we speak of beauty as if it were a property of things and we say that the thing is beautiful.

In neoclassical ballet the notion of beauty and its communication is still central. The movements are beautiful, but not always graceful. The strict ballet technique is followed but not religiously, there are exceptions. We have no sense of illusion or airiness. What is being communicated is a more human-like type of beauty, a more mundane and everyday life beauty rather than the fairy tale, illusory type of beauty of the previous genres. It is a beauty than can be found in the simple and the ordinary - a more subjective type of beauty, if we are allowed such a characterization. The element of harmony is always present, but Kant's universal pleasure has no place. However, the disinterested beauty central to Kantian aesthetics is still manifested in the dances. Grace and harmony are the main factors that influence the symbolic and consequently the physical space of neoclassical ballets.

The idea of a simpler, natural beauty is taken even further by Isadora Duncan. In her case, the strict, sophisticated and almost artificial ballet technique is altogether abandoned. The idea behind each creation is to communicate natural beauty, which is why movement is ordinary and simple. Duncan thought that via natural movement the individual soul could be

---

<sup>124</sup> §9.

connected to the cosmos. These ideas constitute the symbolic space of her creation and are manifested with movements that do not stress the body's abilities but come naturally to the dancer. Duncan's dances are not just beautiful they are naturally beautiful. A parallel with Kant can, surprisingly, be found here. 'Nature is beautiful because it looks like art, and art can only be called beautiful if we are conscious of it as art while yet it looks like nature.'<sup>125</sup> The realization of this idea can be found in Duncan's dances. Of course the association of beauty with nature is not something new or radical. One could argue that, if we allow for the possibility of objective beauty, this could be found only in nature. The quotation comes from the part of the *Critique* where Kant discusses the case of artistic genius. His doctrine of artistic creativity became the foundation of Romanticism. Fine art is the art of the artistic genius, who has 'a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given.'<sup>126</sup> The discussion about artistic genius, though, is irrelevant to the present exploration and will not concern us here.

The later dance genres are gradually driven further and further away from the idea of beauty. The abstract ideas of beauty, grace or harmony consequently do not influence in the least their symbolic spaces, since the choreographers have radically different preoccupations. Rudolf Laban is not concerned with grace or beauty. He wants to make movement more expressive of different feelings and emotions rather than beautiful. The expression of different emotional states is his main focus. That is why he encourages improvisation and movement diversity. Although his dances are not against beauty, they are not characterized as beautiful either. As a consequence Kant's approach to beauty cannot be applied to Laban's work.

Nor is beauty a priority for Mary Wigman. As mentioned before, she wants to achieve pure movement in dance, which has minimal external reference, as a way of arguing for the

---

<sup>125</sup> § 45.

<sup>126</sup> § 46.

autonomy of dance. Her dances are neither beautiful nor disturbing; they are controversial, perhaps provocative, and difficult to characterize. To our surprise some relation between Wigman's endeavour for pure movement and the Kantian approach to judgments of taste can be detected. In the 'Third Moment' of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, particularly in paragraphs 13 to 16, Kant argues that a pure judgment of taste cannot be based on elements of charm or emotion, nor on empirical sensations such as pleasing colours, nor a definite concept, but only on formal properties. It might be true that ornamentation and elements of charm or emotion attract us to beautiful things, but judging them purely in terms of beauty – as we should do – requires us to abstract from these elements and reflect only on their form. To this extent Kant gives priority to a formalist approach in aesthetics. This is exactly what Wigman was trying to do. She tried to strip dance from all external elements manifesting the superiority of 'pure' form not of beauty. At this point it should be made clear that the symbolic space of Wigman's dances does not include communication of the abstract idea of beauty but of pure form, despite the fact that one can argue that in this case beauty could be found in the purity of form.

Martha Graham's creations fall more or less into the same category in relation to beauty as Wigman's. The idea of beauty is not part of the symbolic space of the dances, but at the same time her dances cannot be characterized either as beautiful or as ugly. There is a certain dynamic about them, which makes them unique, perhaps due to the use of the contraction and release in movement.

The same goes for Merce Cunningham's works, although the use of chance procedures in the process of the creation of his dances can be sometimes disturbing. Yet it is true for the majority of choreographers after Duncan that despite their dances not being characterized as beautiful and the abstract idea of beauty not forming part of the symbolic space of the dances,



there are always individual movement sequences or scenes in a dance that are characterized as beautiful by certain people; beautiful in a simple and ordinary way that has nothing to do with the traditional beauty of ballet. Sally Banes in *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*<sup>127</sup> in discussing the term 'post-modern dance' distinguishes the '... Two separate dance traditions. One was the uniquely twentieth-century phenomenon of modern dance; the other was the balletic, academic *dance de l'école*, with its strict canons of beauty, grace, harmony, and the equally potent, regal verticality of the body extending back to the Renaissance courts of Europe.' The movements of modern dance can be graceful but not always beautiful. Some people think that they are beautiful because of their eccentricity or due to their dynamic, while for others the same movements/dances are cruel and aggressive. But this point underlines exactly what Kant wanted to refute, namely the subjective nature of the judgment on what is beautiful or not.

Finally, both Yvonne Rainer and Pina Bausch went to the other extreme: their dances are manifestations of the slogan 'Against Beauty'; to be more precise, against ballet's type of beauty, because even in their works there are beautiful sequences and scenes. Rainer wanted to achieve pure movement and Bausch to blur the borders between dance and everyday life movement. To this end they tried to strip from movement and their dances any suggestion of the ideas of grace and beauty. One could argue that they achieved exactly the opposite: they emphasized the importance of beauty by its mere absence. The extent to which they were successful even in their overt aim is debatable, since there are dance critics who consider their creations to be beautiful in their own type of way.

---

<sup>127</sup> Sally Banes, 'Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance', in Michael Huxley and Noel Witts eds, *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader* (London and New York: Routledge 1996) pp.30 -3.

#### 4.4. Art and Beauty

In Section 4.2 we discussed the difficulty of defining the term 'beauty' in the same way that in Chapter 1 we presented the similar difficulty, if not outright inability, to define the term 'art'.<sup>128</sup> As a consequence we concluded that we can give only explanations, explications or clarifications of these terms by offering examples of the situations and circumstances under which the terms are used in order to have a more or less common understanding of the meaning of the words. What interests us here is to explore the peculiar relation between the two terms.

The experiences that we have when listening to music, reading poetry, looking at a painting or attending a dance performance have a unique character and direct us to express them in a special vocabulary, and to use adjectives such as beautiful, exquisite or even inspiring. As a consequence beauty is one of the first notions that strikes us as relevant to a discussion about art. An everyday approach to what is called a work of art would be to say, it is a beautiful object. But why do we tend so often to associate art with beauty?<sup>129</sup> It is generally accepted that for an object to be judged beautiful it must evoke a pleasurable response in the viewer.<sup>130</sup> It might be true that some works of art evoke a feeling of pleasure in the viewer, so they are rightly - according to the above statement - characterized as beautiful, but art is not always beautiful: it can be disturbing, controversial or even ugly. But we still characterize these works as works of art. One could argue that these are examples of bad art but this is not

---

<sup>128</sup> Section 1.5.

<sup>129</sup> Any reflection on beauty and art gives rise to a rich and diverse field of philosophical issues, only some of which are considered here.

<sup>130</sup> This is one of the principles upon which Kant based his aesthetic theory. Of course, he realized that there are a number of things that are not art which are characterized as beautiful and that is why he differentiated between 'artistic' and other pleasures.

always the case. An artwork may not be characterized as beautiful, but it may still be an interesting piece of artistic work and classified as such. Abstract art is one of the most obvious examples which support this view. Overall, abstract art can receive a variety of diverse characterizations but beautiful will seldom be one of them.

At this point we are confronted with the highly problematic questions: 'What is art?' and 'On what are the judgments that something is or is not art based?' or even 'Who decides what is a work of art?' The debate about art, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is endless. The various aesthetic theories over the years tried to find a single criterion for art but they failed. The criterion of beauty is another unsuccessful attempt to distinguish art from non-art. To characterize something as beautiful is as subjective and relative as characterizing something as a work of art. In fact beauty is a relative term whose intelligibility varies from one historical period to another and changes in accordance with social attitudes. What was hailed as beautiful in previous centuries may not be considered so today. One person may find something beautiful, but often others do not concur. Why, then, do we insist on using such a relative term so frequently, and especially in relation to works of art?

Moreover, as far as the value of beauty is concerned it can be argued that it lies in itself. Beauty is to be valued for its own sake; a claim that should direct us to the notorious artistic slogan 'Beauty for beauty's sake' or the wider one 'Art for art's sake'.<sup>131</sup> Despite its being questionable whether we want to support such a claim, it is also doubtful whether by accepting that the value of beauty is not measured in terms of utility, for example, we can make a case for the value of art. How do we go from the value of beauty to the value of art? It

---

<sup>131</sup> According to David Cooper the doctrine 'seems guilty of confusing two questions – that of the proper attitude towards a work of art, and that of why it may be desirable for this attitude to be taken'. From his *A Companion to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) entry: *attitude, aesthetic*.

might be true that the value of the beautiful lies in contemplation of it or in its preservation, but then why do we need art at all if beauty can be found in the world that surrounds us. In this way the value, if any, of art remains without a valid explanation. In addition, the variety of art forms is also inexplicable. If contemplation of beauty constitutes the value of art, why do we need dance, if we already have painting? Is the notion of beauty different in dance from music?

There is an inherent difficulty in justifying any judgment of the type 'This work of art is beautiful' and the only possible solution to this problem is to avoid general characterizations. By being more specific regarding the characteristics of each work of art we might reach a more satisfactory position. 'Beautiful' is too broad a term to give an accurate account and description of any work of art. This is well illustrated by a further comparison of classical ballet and modern dance.

#### **4.5. A Further Analysis of Beauty**

Our discussion of beauty in relation to the particular dance genres had enabled us to distinguish between two levels of beauty<sup>132</sup>: On a first level we talk about beautiful/graceful movements, where the latter are harmonious and create an impression of airiness and fragility. In other words the first level refers to the beauty of the physical space of the dance, the beauty of the performed movements. The latter rests partly on the execution of the movements by the dancers, although we should be able to discern when an initially beautiful movement is badly executed. This kind of beauty, the beauty of the physical space, is as a consequence ephemeral and tends to vanish when a particular dance performance ends. The judgments we

---

<sup>132</sup> Similar to that which was claimed about mimesis in the previous chapter.



make about the beauty of the movements are subjective despite the fact that statistically we tend to find symmetrical movements more beautiful than asymmetrical ones. (The explanation for this is to be found in psychological or scientific analysis.) The error is to confuse the necessity of universality with the universality of the necessity.<sup>133</sup>

On a second level, perhaps more importantly for our exploration, we are concerned with the way that beauty and grace are manifested in the dance and the way these abstract notions are communicated to the audience through movement. This refers to the beauty of the symbolic space and the way in which the symbolic space is transformed into physical space. The phrase 'beauty of the symbolic space' has here a double meaning: Firstly, the idea of beauty influences the symbolic space of the dance; that is to say, the choreographer wants to communicate the idea of beauty through movement and to highlight the pleasure that can be generated by beauty. Secondly, the symbolic space of the dance is not influenced by the abstract idea of beauty, but by the desire to communicate another abstract idea, another meaning, and this is done beautifully. Sometimes it is the beauty of the message that makes a whole dance beautiful. In this case the idea of beauty might be completely absent from the symbolic space of the dance. Consequently the aesthetic judgment that a dance is beautiful can refer either to the beauty of the movement – i.e. to the beauty of the form – or to the beauty of the message – which might be beauty itself or any other notion.<sup>134</sup>

It is thus underlined once again how difficult it is to define beauty explicitly and how great are the variety of aspects that can influence our aesthetic judgments and their reference points. It is not only that judgments of taste are subjective; they might also refer to a number of

---

<sup>133</sup> Refer also to previous Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

<sup>134</sup> The dances of Martha Graham and Pina Bausch can be characterized as beautiful not because of the gracefulness of the movements of which they consist but because of their deeper meaning.

different elements of a dance, making Kant's attempt to systematize our aesthetic judgments even more problematic. Even if we allow that all dances are somehow beautiful, the all-embracing validity of the judgments of taste that Kant suggests in the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, and the normative role that Kant wants to impose on beauty in terms of the universal satisfaction that everybody should feel in the presence or contemplation of a beautiful object, goes against the very nature of the process: the communication between artist and audience/spectator/viewer through the transformation of symbolic to physical space and *vice versa*.

Bearing always in mind that the symbolic space of the dance is constituted by the ideas, messages and feelings that each choreographer wants to communicate, we can understand how this symbolic space is diffused by subjectivity and not as Kant suggests by objectivity. Furthermore the reverse transformation of the physical to the symbolic by the spectator carries with it the notion of subjectivity, since each member of the audience brings to the transformation their own experiences and perceptions. As a consequence the Kantian approach, which is governed by the idea of universality, even if the latter is a subjective one,<sup>135</sup> does not coincide with our approach to dance as a way of communicating ideas and feelings.

One could argue at this point that the necessary possession of knowledge of the 'codes' (of transformation) of the language of dance could provide dance with a background universality in order to make understanding possible. But these 'codes' are elements external to dance: created by us through the thorough analysis of the different dances as tools for understanding. They do not directly affect the symbolic space of the dance but only the reverse transformation of physical to symbolic space executed by the audience. The only effect is on

---

<sup>135</sup> 'Subjective universality' is paradoxical and begs a factual question even when it is not associated with artistic activity.

the symbolic space that each member of the audience brings to the dance, though they can influence the different interpretations of a particular piece; something that is evident in the realms of criticism.

In the following section we argue that beauty, in general terms, despite being a quality of the majority of dances, is not the only one. A dance is created to manifest many other important qualities and, importantly, to communicate a meaning. As a consequence beauty could not constitute the sole criterion for dance as art.

#### **4.6. Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter we examined the relation of a central aesthetic notion, beauty, to dance. We gave an explanation of the term beauty by describing its subjective character and by comparing it to the notion of grace and harmony as well. Kant's project, as presented in his *Critique of Judgment*, to find the *a priori* conditions for making judgments based on pleasure, namely judgments that something is beautiful, was also briefly presented and rejected as inadequate, since it failed to take forward a coherent characterization of this particular art form. We acknowledge that the presentation of his account is very brief and, as a consequence, the criticism here is insufficient. The point made is that Kant's approach to art does not help a characterization of dance. In the main it fails to account for the significance of the expanding realization of intra-cultural and intercultural diversity in art in general and in dance in particular. As a consequence the pre-conditions of transcendental arguments are not satisfied, as was demonstrated in the analysis of the different dance genres in terms of beauty. As a result, we

consider any attempt to explore dance from a Kantian perspective is hopeless, since his narrow aesthetic criterion comes nowhere near characterizing dance.

Through the analysis of the specific examples of dance genres it was made clear that not all dances can be characterized as beautiful, despite the fact that some isolated movement sequences in almost every dance are beautiful. We briefly presented the particular relation between the notions of art and beauty and we discussed the problems that arise. We also made the distinction between two levels of beauty in dance: on the first level we refer to beautiful – graceful and harmonious – movement, to the beauty of the physical space of the dance, while on the second level we discuss whether the abstract idea of beauty has influenced the symbolic space of the dance and, if this is the case, how it is communicated via movement to the audience. We also suggested that the meaning that dance wants to communicate and which influences the symbolic space of the dance can be characterized as beautiful. We conjecture that it might also be the case that the importance of the notion of beauty can be emphasized through its deliberate absence. It became apparent that beauty can have diverse manifestations in dance that change over time and in accordance with the communicated message. Beauty is a notion that is related to dance but it is not the only, or always the most important characteristic of dance. This was made perfectly clear when we attempted to use beauty as a criterion for dance.

Beauty does not seem to help us very much in the distinction between dance and gymnastics. It might be the case that we characterize gymnastics and dance differently. Our criteria for what is beautiful in dance and what in gymnastics are different due to the different importance/significance that we attribute to the various elements of the two activities. For



example accuracy and technical perfection is more important to gymnastics than beauty, although a perfectly executed movement of gymnastics can be beautiful.

Nor is the criterion of beauty helpful in the distinction between dance and everyday movement. A woman can move gracefully in the house without being a dancer or without dancing. Beautiful movements are not only dance movements. Everyday life movements can be beautiful or graceful as well. Beauty can be related to dance and dance movements but not exclusively.

In this chapter we showed the non-exclusive relation between dance and beauty as well as the problematic nature of the term 'beautiful'. There is no doubt that a common judgment of a dance is that it is beautiful, but this does not seem to contribute greatly in our understanding and appreciation of dance. Beauty or its absence can be an important element in dance, indeed of every artistic activity, but not definitive.

In the next chapter we explore whether the expression of feelings and ideas can provide us with a better account of dance aesthetics and a better understanding of dance.

## 5. Dance as Expression

### 5.1. Introductory Remarks

It has been suggested in the previous explorations<sup>136</sup> that dance is to a greater or lesser extent expressive of feelings and emotions. This is not a characteristic particular to dance. It is one of the commonest views of art in general that it is essentially a form of expression, expression of feelings and emotions. This theory of art as self-expression - or simply expression - has been very influential since the romantic era and has been defended by artists and critics, and philosophers such as Tolstoy, Collingwood and Croce.

In this chapter we are interested in exploring how this notion of 'expression' can be related to the art of dance. To achieve that we attempt to provide an explanation/ explication of the term 'expression' as presented in the different versions of the expressive theory. In relation to dance the theory of art as expression supports the view that dance is a medium for the communication of feelings and emotions which usually cannot be communicated in other ways. We are not so much concerned as to whether the theory in general, or its particular versions presented here, provide a satisfactory account of art, but with the abstract idea of 'expression' that can derive from them and its relation to classical ballet and modern dance.

In brief, there are two senses in which the term 'expression' can be understood: the narrower sense, which refers to the expression of feelings and emotions such as joy or sadness, is the way that the term expression is used in the expressive theories of art; the

---

<sup>136</sup> Chapters 3 and 4.

broader sense of expression is close to the notion of communication. In this latter sense, it is not only feelings but also ideas that are being expressed.<sup>137</sup>

Consequently we look at how and to what extent the notion of expression of feelings and emotions influences the symbolic space of the different dance genres and whether dance is or must always be expressive. The influential dance critic John Martin is critically discussed and his views on modern dance appraised. According to Martin 'The art of dance is the expression and transference through the medium of bodily movement of mental and emotional experiences that the individual cannot express by rational or intellectual means.'<sup>138</sup> The dancer's movements are intentional. The movements of the dancer's muscles are transferred by kinesthetic sympathy to the muscles of the spectator; and because the latter is used to associating movements with intentions, he is able to arrive at the intention that lies behind the movement. Martin derived this idea from the Greek notion of 'metakinesis'.

We conclude by considering whether expression provides us with satisfactory answers to the initial questions on the distinction between dance and everyday movement, and dance and gymnastics. Finally, we are interested in exploring whether the notion of expression and highlighting of the expressive elements of dance can contribute to our understanding and appreciation of dance.

---

<sup>137</sup> This distinction was made both by George F. Todd, 'Expression without Feeling', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 30 (1972): 477-88 and by Noël Carroll, 'Post-Modern Dance and Expression', in Gordon Fancher and Gerald Myers eds, *Philosophical Essays on Dance* (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1981), pp.95-103.

<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Copeland and Cohen, 1983, p.5.

## 5.2. Art and Expressivism

The view that artists are inspired by emotional experiences and use their talent with words, paint, music, marble, movement and so on to realize those emotions in a work of art aiming to stimulate the same emotion in an audience, is called 'expressivism'.<sup>139</sup>

The theory came to the fore at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century with the development of the Romantic Movement. At that time artists began to focus on their inner world, 'they became less preoccupied with capturing the appearance of nature and the manners of society than with exploring their own subjective experiences.'<sup>140</sup> This does not mean that painters, for example, stopped painting landscapes but that the landscapes 'were charged with significance beyond their physical properties.'<sup>141</sup> The artists tried, in other words, to allow their own feelings, the way they responded, to be seen through their works. As a consequence, the artists of the era presented the world 'from an emotionally saturated point of view where the emotional perspectives of the individual artist are more important than simply describing whatever gave rise to them.'<sup>142</sup> Artists are now primarily concerned with the presentation of their inner world, of their emotions and feelings.

We can trace the origins of the word 'expression' to a Latin word which means 'pressing outwards'. That is exactly what the various versions of the expression theory want to suggest:

---

<sup>139</sup> A distinction needs to be made here between the terms 'expressivism' and 'expressionism'. (This distinction is made clearly by Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, (London: Routledge, 1997). According to the expressive theory of art what is of fundamental importance in art is emotion, not only the feeling of the artist but also the 'emotional impact' that his work has on the audience. If we are to accept that 'pleasure is the commonplace explanation of the value of art, expression of emotion is the commonplace view of its nature.' This view can be plausibly called 'expressivism'. Expressionism is a widely used term, attributed to a school of painting, which has as its main motto that painting *must* contain emotion. The two terms are of course related, but expressivism refers to art in general and not only to the visual arts. Here we are concerned with expressivism, also called expression theory, and not with the particular movement.

<sup>140</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.59.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, p.60.



the role of a work of art is to bring the feelings of the artist to the surface in such a way that the audience can also share these feelings.

This claim underpins most of, if not all, the expression theories that were proposed following the first appearance of the theory in the late eighteenth century. Here, we discuss three of the most popular and influential versions: that suggested by Leo Tolstoy in *What is Art?*, which is the most naïve version of expressivism, that by Benedetto Croce in his *Guide to Aesthetics* and a more elaborated version propounded by R.G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art*. For all three the aim was the same: to define art and to find the criterion which will enable us to say that A is a work of art whereas B is not. They held that this criterion was the expression of emotion. If a painting, for example, is expressing emotions, namely the emotions of the artist, and these emotions can be successfully communicated to the audience, then this painting is a work of art. This brief statement of the expression theory, which will now be explored in more detail.

### **5.3. Tolstoy's Account – Everyday Expressivism**

'Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them.'<sup>143</sup>

In these few sentences Tolstoy manages to connect three distinct components: the artist's feeling and emotions, the work through which the artist expresses his feelings and emotions and communicates them to the audience, and the audience which is asked to share

---

<sup>143</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, trans. by Colin Lyas (London: Duckworth, 1994) p.59.

the artist's feelings and emotions. In this way a relation is being built between the artist and his audience. According to this view when the artists express their feelings, they do it intentionally. That is their aim. The element of the intentional activity is fundamental to the expression theory. This intended 'embodiment' of the emotion is successful when it stimulates the same emotion in its audience. In this way artists are said to communicate emotional experiences. In short the idea is that artists through art transmit their feelings to others in the same way that we via words/language transmit our thoughts.

Tolstoy thus tries to disconnect art from mere pleasure. What he wants to suggest is that art ought to give more than superficial satisfaction to individuals. He wants to attribute to art a social function and to underline its communicative role. At the same time he 'denies that an interest in art is simply an interest in beauty'.<sup>144</sup>

We are accustomed to understand art to be only what we hear and see in theatres, concerts, and exhibitions; together with buildings, poems and novels... but all this is but the smallest part of the art by which we communicate with one another in life. All human life is filled with works of art of every kind – from cradle-song, jest, mimicry, the ornamentation of houses, dress, and utensils, to church services, buildings, monuments, and triumphal processions. It is all artistic activity. So that by art, in the limited sense of the word, we do not mean all human activity transmitting feelings, but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach special importance.<sup>145</sup>

However this is a very vague description of what art is and reveals what will be the main objection to the expression theory: the account of art that it suggests is far too broad and includes many aspects of human activity that surely cannot be characterized as art.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> Lyas, 1997, p.60.

<sup>145</sup> Tolstoy, 1994, pp.60-1.

<sup>146</sup> John Hospers, 'The Concept of Artistic Expression', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 55 (1955): 313-44 (included in John Hospers ed., *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics* (London: Macmillan, 1969) pp.142-67).

A second objection is that Tolstoy falsely assumes that the artist must have a very distinct feeling, which he needs to communicate to the audience, before even starting to create the work of art.<sup>147</sup> This also suggests that the work is merely used as a means to an end, namely communication between the artist and the audience. This removes any sense of autonomy from the work of art. (Collingwood offers a modification to this element of the theory and introduces the idea that the artist clarifies the feeling that he wants to express through his work in the process of creating it.) Tolstoy also claims that the artist must be familiar with the emotion he wants to express even if this emotion is not a result of a real event. He claims that in order for the artist to be able to imaginatively express a certain emotion through his creation, he must have experienced this emotion at some time in real life.

A further mistaken assumption in Tolstoy's account is the belief that the receiver of the work, the audience, must have exactly the same feeling as the creator of the work. In fact it is possible for a work of art to create completely different – if not opposing – emotions in the audience from the emotions that were generated during its creation. There is no requirement that the audience shares the feelings expressed by the work. It is also quite possible for the same work of art to create different feelings in different spectators.

Wittgenstein has an interesting point to raise here: 'A work of art forces us – as one might say – to see it (an individual thing) in the right perspective but, in the absence of art, the object is just a fragment of nature like any other'<sup>148</sup>. Wittgenstein here ascribes to art a very decisive role and a specific power. Tilghman, analyzing Wittgenstein's views on the subject, introduces the controversial notion of the right perspective in art:

---

<sup>147</sup> There is a debate between aestheticians about whether Tolstoy suggests that the feeling is there before the artist begins to create the work or the work is the way the feeling is conveyed.

<sup>148</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G.H.von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) p.4.

To see an object in the right perspective is surely to see it as having a certain spirit or expression, but the world certainly does not force us to see it in the right perspective; in fact it is doubtful whether there is a right way of seeing the world. There are, of course, ethically preferable ways of seeing it – as happy rather than unhappy, for example – but how we see it is left up to us. A work of art, by contrast, shows us things as seen by someone else and thus does not leave its vision up to us, but forces us, as we might say, to see those things as the artist did.<sup>149</sup>

It is true that if we want to engage fully with the work of art in front of us, we have to try and perceive it from its own perspective. Nobody will deny that we seem to find a fuller satisfaction in works of art whose perspective we can share and understand. This, of course, does not mean that we can only appreciate works we comprehend, though that is probably the case for some people, nor that our taste is fixed, or even pre-fixed, forever and cannot be changed. Finally, as far as the right perspective is concerned, it is a question as to whether we think that there is right and wrong in art.

We may assume from a consideration of the expression theory as presented by Tolstoy that this theory attributes the origins of artistic production to emotional experience *a priori*; the emotion pre-exists the creation of the work, when it seems that the causal conditions under which a work of art is being created can only be determined *a posteriori*. The expression theory takes for granted that it was emotional experience that caused various artists to create in the way they did, and using the means they did. At the same time many acclaimed artists have denied that emotion was their inspiration.

John Hospers discerns another problem. He attacks the expression theory for seeming to involve a version of what he calls the 'genetic fallacy'. The fallacy consists in assessing the merits or demerits of something by reference solely to its cause.

---

<sup>149</sup> B.R. Tilghman, *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics – The View from Eternity*, Swansea Studies in Philosophy, ed. D.Z. Phillips (London: Macmillan, 1991) p.52.



Even if all artists did in fact go through the process described by the expression theory, even if nobody but artists did this, would it be true to say that the work of art was a good one because the artist in creating it, went through this or that series of experiences in plying his medium? Once the issue is put thus baldly, I cannot believe that anyone could easily reply in the affirmative; it seems much too plain that the merits of a work of art must be judged by what we find in the work of art, quite regardless of the conditions under which the work of art came into being.<sup>150</sup>

Hospers here argues that we should judge a work of art in itself. We should not try to explore how it was created, that is, give consideration to the intention of the artist, and then judge the work according to whether the intention – in the case of expressive theory, the communication of feeling – has been successfully realized or not.

There is an inherent difficulty with the whole concept of the embodiment of emotion in a work of art. How exactly can emotion be embodied in a work of art? Because the emotion, according to the theory, is not only in the artist and in the audience, but also in the work itself. We can say of a painting or a song that it was caused by sadness, or that it causes sadness or reveals sadness in others but can we say that it is itself sad? The reply to this is that we must draw a distinction between 'being an expression of a certain emotion' and 'being expressive of this emotion'. It seems then that expressivism has to suggest that works of art are expressive of an emotion without being an expression of that emotion.<sup>151</sup>

Another inadequacy of the everyday version of expressivism is that it fails to give an explanation of the value of art. We might ask what is so fine about the expression of feelings such as joy or sadness in art. Why should a work of art have to express joy for example in order to be considered as a work of art? To consider the expression of emotion as a criterion

---

<sup>150</sup> Hospers, 1955, p. 320.

<sup>151</sup> This distinction is made in Graham, 1997: 'Being an expression of emotion implies that there is someone whose expression it is. Being 'expressive of' does not imply any possessor, either artist or audience.' p.35. This distinction was also used by Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) in defence of an expressivist theory of music.

of so-called 'proper' art deprives art of another element that it may be thought to possess, namely imaginativeness.<sup>152</sup> Requiring that the emotion expressed in the work of art should be the artist's own emotion denies an important characteristic of many remarkable works of art, namely their being major attainments of imagination. According to Graham's view 'it is not merely that expressivism ignores the value of imagination; it actually eliminates it. An emotion that is imagined need not be felt, and the nascence of feeling is a mark of real artistic activity. But we cannot accommodate this kind of creativity in the expressivist model'.<sup>153</sup>

It is also reasonable to think that, according to the theory, we are to judge the value of a work of art according to the value of the emotion it arouses. Plato wanted to ban poets and artists from his Republic for exactly this reason: their ability to arouse dangerous emotions. For expressivism the arousal of emotion in itself is neutral. Tolstoy did not attribute any value to the communication of emotion in itself, but only to the communication of good emotion. (He held that good emotions are related to Christian ideals, but we shall not be exploring that aspect of the discussion here.<sup>154</sup>)

There is a connection here with the Aristotelian idea of 'catharsis'.<sup>155</sup> According to this idea, the artist by arousing emotions in the audience releases them from their possible emotional disturbances. Hence the value of art appears to be the contribution it makes to our mental health. If we accept this view to be true, art can release us from both harmful and

---

<sup>152</sup> This is the element that Collingwood adds to the everyday version of expression theory. He allows for the role of imagination in art.

<sup>153</sup> Graham, 1997, p.29.

<sup>154</sup> An interesting related issue that arises is whether we should consider bad art as art or as non-art? Can we talk about degrees of goodness and badness in art and according to what criteria? See the discussion on good and bad art in Chapter 1 (1.5). Of course, most usages of 'good' and 'bad' art in art criticism are not ethics-related.

<sup>155</sup> This idea is also suggested by Gordon Graham in his presentation of expressivism.

beneficial emotions, so as a result we characterize some art as good, when it arouses and expels bad emotions, and some art as bad when the opposite happens.<sup>156</sup>

As we have seen so far the expression theory of art, and especially Tolstoy's version of it, though popular, is highly problematic because it fails to provide us with a criterion for art. So why has the theory remained popular? It seems that its appeal derives from the fact that many people find particular works of art moving and are, consequently, moved by them. But this is a psychological and not a philosophical or aesthetic claim. However our philosophy of art reflects our psychology, and were the latter to be different perhaps so would our views of art. It should not then come as a surprise that different periods have given birth to different theories of art that mirror the way artists, critics and public thought (and felt) about works of art.

Bearing in mind the inadequacies of Tolstoy's rather limited version of expressivism, we can now examine a more sophisticated version, which tried to provide answers to some of the questions raised, namely Benedetto Croce's account of the expression theory.

#### **5.4. Croce's Account**

Croce's expression theory is best reflected in his books *The Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*<sup>157</sup> and *Guide to Aesthetics*<sup>158</sup>.

In his account intuition is identified with the aesthetic and is the fundamental notion upon which his whole theory is based. Art is essentially intuition and 'what lends coherence

---

<sup>156</sup> e.g. eroticism, pornography.

<sup>157</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. by Douglas Ainslie and Peter Owen (London: Vision Press, 1953).

<sup>158</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Guide to Aesthetics*, trans. by P. Romanelli (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). Croce's views are most directly presented in the essay entitled 'What is Art?' (a conscious reference to Tolstoy).

and unity to intuition is intense feeling. Intuition is truly such because it expresses an intense feeling and can arise only when the latter is its source and base. Not idea but intense feeling is what confers upon art the ethereal lightness of the symbol.'<sup>159</sup> What should strike us in this passage is the absence of any reference to art's effect on the audience. This constitutes one of the main differences from Tolstoy's account.

We need to determine what Croce means by intuition, since the everyday meaning of the term is not helpful. By intuition Croce refers to the power to produce representations. More specifically, the representations produced by aesthetic intuition are representations of particular things, for example a pen.<sup>160</sup> From the representation of a particular object we can then move to the representations of general concepts, so that we end up being able to talk not of a particular pen but about pens in general. He claims then that representations produced by aesthetic intuition are at the same time expressions. Croce wants to deny that art has the character of conceptual knowledge, since the latter is based on a distinction between reality and unreality, a distinction that intuition lacks. In order to understand the meaning and value of a work of art we should look only at the work itself and can ignore the world beyond the work. He also locates art as expression as being at the core of our understanding of the world.

Croce wants to suggest that when something is troubling us, we have the inclination to try to make sense of it by categorizing it; and the way to achieve that is by creating a representation that gives it a form. Croce describes this process as:

Individual A seeks an expression for the impression he feels, or of which he has a presentiment but which he has not yet expressed. See him trying out different words and phrases which might give him the expression he seeks, which must be there, although he has not got hold of it yet. He tries a combination, m, and rejects it as inadequate, inexpressive, defective and ugly; he tries a combination n, with the

---

<sup>159</sup> Croce, 1965, p.25.

<sup>160</sup> This concept of intuition is similar to Kant's view on intuition, indicating that Croce was aware of his ideas.



same outcome. He cannot see at all or he cannot see clearly. The expression still eludes him. After other vain attempts, in which he now draws near, now draws away from that towards which he strains, of a sudden he finds the form of the expression sought (it almost seems that it forms spontaneously in him) and *lux facta est*. He enjoys for an instant aesthetic pleasure or beauty. The ugly, with its corresponding displeasure, was that aesthetic activity that did not succeed in conquering the obstacles that lay in its way: the beautiful is the expressive activity that now triumphantly unfolds itself.<sup>161</sup>

From this it becomes evident that Croce was aware that notions previously related to art, such as beauty and representation, had failed to provide a satisfactory criterion for art and he suggests the term 'expression' as an (obvious) alternative.

It is essential for our understanding of Croce's version of expressivism to clarify the meaning he attributes to the word 'expression'. Croce's expression is neither rule-governed nor reducible to formulae. And it is 'not only that there are no rules for creating expressions, there are no rules for judging them either.'<sup>162</sup> As a consequence, when a work of art is being created, the artist is not in a position to know what it is going to be until the expression is achieved. So the artist cannot choose in advance to produce a work of art. This way artistic expression is independent from morality because it does not involve choices, as morality does. The only way, in Croce's view, that art can become involved with morality is, when once one has produced a work of art, one chooses whether or not to exhibit or publish that expression/work of art, which decision could be based on moral grounds.

A further issue that Croce raises, which is partly related to criticism, concerns the importance of the notion of the organic unity (a notion he did not invent himself but which became influential as a result of Croce's work). This simply means that all the parts contribute to the overall effect and the overall effect is greater than the sum of the parts. 'It is in the

---

<sup>161</sup> Croce, 1965, p.132.

<sup>162</sup> Lysas, 1997, p. 71.

overall result, in the distinctive effect that everyone admires and that determines and bends to its service all the individual parts, and not in these individual parts, detached, and abstractly considered in themselves, that... a work of art... resides'<sup>163</sup> and he adds that 'division destroys the work, just as dividing a living organism into heart, brain, nerves and muscles and so on changes a living thing into a corpse.'<sup>164</sup>

Croce contends that the apprehension of the work of art is internal, something with which Collingwood will later agree. Croce claims that what we call in everyday language a work of art, namely a painting on the wall, is the external work of art and this is never the real work, which is always internal. The reason why Croce claims that works of art are internal originates from his view that we have not said anything significant about a work of art when we have simply listed its features; an idea that springs from the notion of organic unity. Croce, according to Colin Lyas, thought that this meant that a work of art is not a physical thing.

Croce's account of art is quite plausible, but it also has its problems and difficulties. The main problem, common to all versions of expressivism as well as to many other accounts of art, is that he tries to find characteristics - criteria - to define art, in order to discover the essence of art. These characteristics should be necessary (art has to have them) and sufficient (only art has them) conditions in order for something to be a work of art. Croce's account offers only one condition as the essence of art: expression. But this condition is neither necessary nor sufficient, as we shall show immediately.

To say that expression is a necessary condition for art means that, if something is art, it necessarily must be expression; and to say it is sufficient means that, if something is expression, this suffices to make it art. Clearly, we can prove the first claim to be false if we

---

<sup>163</sup> Croce, 1965, p.3.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*, pp.21-2.

find something that is art and not expression and we can prove the second wrong if we find something that is expression and not art.

It is easy to find things that are expressions and not art. Take for example the simple verbal utterance 'I love you', which certainly expresses a feeling but hardly constitutes a work of art. This seems to indicate that there are two types of expressions: those that are art and those that are not, artistic and non-artistic expressions. Croce would argue that it is impossible to show something like this, namely that there are different kinds of expression. He claims that all that can be shown is that there can be a difference in the *degree* of the expression. Furthermore, while he allows that some expressions are characterized as art, whereas others are not, he wants to suggest that this does not originate from a real difference.

The idea behind the above claims is that we can distinguish ordinary (everyday) expressions from artistic ones, because the latter have a greater intensity. But we cannot plausibly support the claim that artistic expressions are more intense than the everyday-life ones. Colin Lyas gives the following example to illustrate this point: 'A simple declaration of love can be as intensely felt as that sentiment expressed by a great poet.'<sup>165</sup>

In another effort to make the above differentiation clearer Croce claims that there is a greater 'range' of expression involved in a work of art than in an ordinary expression. Croce goes even further by saying that the range of cases for which we use the term 'art' is not as wide as the range of cases to which we attribute the word 'expression'. As a result 'art' and 'expression' have the same defining characteristics but 'art' is a narrower term than expression, in the sense that art can be a type of expression. If this is true, still there is no

---

<sup>165</sup> Lyas, 1997, p.98.

difference in kind between artistic and everyday expressions, but only a difference in degree between their ranges.

Where, therefore, do we draw the line between what is called 'art' and what is not? It seems that sometimes this is totally arbitrary.<sup>166</sup> Art critics are tempted to say that the complexity – in relation to expression – of the works of art is the element that differentiates them from the other forms/types of expression. This view places artistic expressions on a level above the everyday (more humble) ones and at the same time, according to Croce's criticism, explains the reason why art and aesthetics form an 'aristocratic club'. Croce disagrees with this distinction of kind between artistic and ordinary expression, because it assumes that what is going on in art bears little relation to what is going on in ordinary life and is one of the 'chief things that has prevented the aesthetic from reaching its real roots in the human soul.'<sup>167</sup> Croce believes that artistic expression originates from our everyday activities, and cannot be conceived outside the world from which it was inspired and in which it is created.<sup>168</sup>

This idea justifies the often expressed popular view that works of art provide us with the means to express our feelings about the world and our lives, and in this lies the value of art. This is a common base enabling us to share the intuitions of an artist and sometimes adopt them.<sup>169</sup> This is one of the very strong points of the expression theory; namely the discovery of a system of communication, apart from the spoken language, a language of feeling that is common to all human beings. According to the expression theory what marks art is the act of

---

<sup>166</sup> Lyas quite plausibly wonders: 'If an expression in the form of an epigram belongs with art, why not a simple word? If a landscape painting is art, why is not a simple topographical sketch?' Lyas, 1997, p.100.

<sup>167</sup> Croce, 1965, p.15.

<sup>168</sup> Wittgenstein seemed to agree with that when claiming that our artistic concepts have their roots in ordinary ones.

<sup>169</sup> Noël Carroll's view on the issue is that '...we are interested in art, on this view, because it affords the opportunity to experience, if not always new emotions, at least emotions more elaborated, articulate and precise than we ordinary do. Art enables audiences to discover and to reflect upon the emotional possibilities.' Carroll, 1999, p.64.



communication of emotion: the inner emotional state of the artist is externalized and transmitted to the audience. The notion of transmission or of transfer of an emotion is the basic concept of the theory. This procedure, of course, is similar, to our suggestion that dance can be understood as a system of communication which is constituted in the transformation of the symbolic to the physical space and *vice versa*.

Let us now examine the case where works of art are not expressions of emotion. Some, maybe most, art may actually communicate and explore feelings, but not all art does this. Some art communicates and explores ideas. Consider the example of modern - abstract - painting, which is concerned with the nature of painting itself and the related problematic. A popular example, in every sense, is that of Andy Warhol, who with his creations wanted to show that there is a very thin line differentiating works of art and real things. Another example is that of M.C. Escher, who was preoccupied with the peculiarity of our visual system and pictorial representations. His art is not emotive, it is cognitive.

In the area of dance, as we shall see in the next section, we have similar phenomena. In the 1960s works produced by postmodern choreographers, such as Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton, were engaging with the issue 'What is dance?' They were not concerned with articulating their own emotions, or with arousing emotions in the audience. They wanted to make the audience think, not feel. In particular, they wanted the audience to contemplate the question of what can be considered as a dance and according to what criteria (for what reasons). As far as such works are art, the expression of emotion is not a necessary condition

for art. Art does not need to be about feelings and emotions; it may be about the communication of ideas.<sup>170</sup>

At this point, the expression theorists may argue against this conclusion in the following ways: they can either deny that the above examples are art, or, they can argue that, despite what appears to be the case, the works in question are concerned with the expression of emotion. The response to these is that, firstly, these works are publicly accepted as art and this is at least a *prima facie* reason for thinking them so. Secondly, if the supporters of the expression theory invoke their theory to support their conclusion that these works are not art, then they have simply assumed what they were supposed to prove.

Another solution for the expression theorist is to argue that the works of Warhol, Escher, Rainer, and Paxton are expressing emotions, even if the artists are unaware of this, just because human beings bring their emotions to everything they do. This is a psychological argument though. Two points should be made here: everything we do is with some attitude, with certain feelings, from some point of view; and we cannot avoid reflecting these states in whatever we create. Therefore these creations, products or works express the feelings and personality of the artist, even if the artist intends otherwise. As a consequence, the expression theory of art is not really unreceptive to such works. Yet both the presuppositions of this counterargument seem false.

Even if it is the case (which one may plausibly doubt) that every human breath is accompanied by some emotional state, mood or attitude, still there is no reason to believe that it will be copied into the products of our creative endeavours.

---

<sup>170</sup> Carroll argues that even Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* is expressive in the broader sense of the term 'expression'. [See the introductory section of this chapter]. Rainer may not express feelings but expresses their negation. '*Trio A* denies expressive effects in the sense that none of the movement is metaphorically emotive but it is clearly expressive in the broadest sense; it is discursive - it calls attention to hitherto unexplored, even suppressed, movement possibilities of the dance medium.' Carroll, 1981, p.101.

Perhaps the most effective way to convince an expression theorist is to present him with a work of choreography like Yvonne Rainer's 'Trio A' and to ask what emotion he thinks is being expressed. The expression theorist's (surely) inevitable silence at this juncture would constitute another piece of evidence against the claim that something is art only if it expresses emotion. Much traditional art does not in fact express emotion. Much of it was created merely to provoke pleasure in its audience. But pleasure is not an emotion, though it may accompany some emotions, and, in any case, these works do not express pleasure; they just stimulate it. Much traditional art is merely beautiful, not expressive. Therefore the expression of emotion is not a necessary condition for being an artwork.

Moreover expressivism seems to remove one of the most valuable aspects of art, namely the imaginative power, by suggesting, ideally, that the emotion expressed in a work should be the artist's own. But there are so many works of art that are remarkable just because they are major imaginative achievements. Expressivism excessively downplays the value of imagination.

We turn now to the third, more sophisticated, and perhaps more successful, version of expressivism, the one put forward by R.G. Collingwood. He admired Croce and was at the same time aware of the problems of everyday expressivism. Consequently, his version of expressivism renounces several characteristics of the two previous versions to which objections had been made.

## 5.5. Collingwood's Account

Collingwood's theory of art as expression is presented in *The Principles of Art*. Before expounding his views on art and works of art, he is concerned to distinguish 'art' from 'craft', a distinction that he considers to be of fundamental importance and on which he will base the further analysis of his theory on what is art. His aim is to define 'art proper', as he calls it, by differentiating it from 'art as magic' (this form of art arouses emotion for practical purposes in ordinary life) and 'art as amusement' (this form arouses emotion for the mere sake of enjoyment). These two forms of art are not proper, because both use art as a means to an end. They are placed by Collingwood in the category of 'craft'. According to his view 'art proper' is an end in itself and is not at all concerned with the arousal of emotion. This constitutes his first objection to the everyday version of expression theory.

His second objection stems from the fact that expressivism supposes that the emotion that is to be found in a work of art pre-exists its creation. He declares 'When a man is said to express emotion, what is being said about him comes to this. At first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on with him, but of whose nature he is ignorant. While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is: 'I feel... I don't know what I feel.' From this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by doing something, which we call expressing himself.' <sup>171</sup>

This 'psychic disturbance', this uneasiness of the artist, gradually takes shape in the process of creating the work, until the artist reaches a point when he can identify the emotion

---

<sup>171</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1938, p.109.



that he wants to express. Artists are not merely possessed by their emotions; they need to examine them first in order to be able to express them. They struggle to identify them and then find the most appropriate way to bring them out in the open. This happens partly by externalizing their emotions and partly by experimenting with different ways and mediums of expression.<sup>172 173</sup>

The process of the clarification of the artist's feelings and emotions 'has a certain resemblance with catharsis, by which emotions are earthed through being discharged into a make-believe situation, but the two things are not the same.' It is wrong to assume that even this uneasiness pre-exists the actual artistic activity; it is more the case that the feeling and the creative activity, without being identical, '... are connected in such a way that... each is conditional upon the other'.<sup>174</sup> This means that they can neither be separated one from another nor one identified without the other. Emotion can be identified only when it has come to its embodiment through the work of art.

However, this notion of clarification of the emotion, which is so important for the expression theorists and constitutes for them the aim of all art, seems problematic. Contrary to what the supporters of the expression theory believe, there is some art which tries to express vague instead of clarified emotions. Consider the Symbolist Art of the late nineteenth century. It suggests vague and ambiguous emotional states. Feelings are judged for their elusiveness.

---

<sup>172</sup> Carroll describes this process as follows: 'A dancer will combine several phrases, a painter several brushstrokes, a composer several chords, and then stand back from them, inquiring whether they are right – where 'right' means 'do they feel right?' or 'do they get the emotion exactly right?' this process clarifies the emotion for the artist at the same time that the emotion inspires and informs the artist's choices.' Carroll, 1999, p.63.

<sup>173</sup> A parenthesis: Carroll has an interesting line to draw here. He argues that an artist can identify his feelings 'by just focusing on them mentally.' But then his emotion will be clarified but not externalized. Can we then claim that a work of art can exist 'entirely...inside someone's head'? According to Carroll's view this would violate our general concept of art, namely that a work of art is a public affair. Moreover, it would also contradict the notion of expression which stems from the idea of externalization, from bringing something that is 'inside' 'outside'.

<sup>174</sup> Collingwood, 1938, p.304.

But symbolist works are still works of art even if they fail to satisfy the condition of clarification. In response the expression theorist can argue that what is being clarified through the creation of the particular works of art is this state of emotional vagueness and ambiguity. This gets them off the hook, but is hardly in the spirit of Collingwood's approach.

Surrealism is also problematic for the expression theory. Surrealist art works are generated by chance procedures. A famous example is the co-operative work of Merce Cunningham and John Cage who created musical and dance scores by casting the runes of the 'I Ching' in their endeavour to avoid any subjective decision-making procedure, replacing it with a random, objective one. Cage and Cunningham, and other artists, have used 'probabilistic' computer programs for the same reasons. Works that are produced this way are called aleatoric and are regarded as art. But if we are to accept that these works are art, then we cannot consider as true the claim that works of art must transmit the emotions of their makers to audiences, since surrealistic (aleatoric) techniques are used to eliminate the influence of the artist's (subjective) emotional experiences. The rules of chance are responsible for the shape of the artwork. Aleatoric art challenges the necessity of the identity, experience and clarification conditions of the transmission theory whilst also, simultaneously, rejecting the idea that the artist intends to transmit anything pre-determined by his own experience. These works are characteristic examples of what could be called 'border-line' cases since they blur the distinction between art and non-art, and cause major debates between critics and aestheticians. These works are also great challenges for any theory of art. The question as to whether we consider this type of creation as artworks is very case specific: a variety of factors need to be taken into consideration in order for us to decide whether a particular work of aleatoric art is (for us) a work of art. Because of their uniqueness and

individuality these works cannot be grouped into well-defined categories. Consequently they become examples of extreme relativity and subjectivity in terms of aesthetic appreciation.

Another difference should be noted between everyday expressivism and Collingwood's account of expression: Collingwood believes that art criticism must focus on the work and not on the artist.<sup>175</sup> Everyday expressivism suggests that the critic should scrutinize the artist's life and psychology. Collingwood objects strongly to this approach, claiming that there is no reason to say that the work is an expression of an emotion, if there is no way that the emotion of the artist expressed in the work can be identified independently of the work. It seems that Collingwood adopts a more autonomous and 'apersonal' view than his predecessors about the relation between the artists and their work. The work is judged for the expressive qualities it possesses, irrespective of what is known about the circumstances under which the work was created.

The latter might give us an indication of the emotional state of the artist at the period of the creation from which we can draw some conclusions in terms of the feelings and emotions that the work expresses. What Collingwood is suggesting is that if we cannot discern these feelings from the work itself, rather than from background information, then the work fails to express emotions. The question that arises is whether it is possible to separate entirely the artist from the product of her creation. Our view is that one cannot, since some elements of a person's personality and psychological state are always reflected in her artistic creations. That is not to say that we should attempt the extremes of searching out every single detail about the artist in order to understand and appreciate a work of art. We need only those that are pertinent.

---

<sup>175</sup> Refer also to Hospers's criticism of everyday expressivism and the latter's focus on the artist rather than the work itself. See footnote 150.

Collingwood's account bears yet one more difference from the everyday version of expressivism. In his account the third component of the process of expression of emotion, namely the audience, is not a prerequisite. This was also Croce's view. That is why Collingwood's account has also been called 'the solo expression theory of art'. He does not require the audience to experience the same feeling that the artist wants to communicate. It seems that in Collingwood's version the artist acts more independently, being unconcerned as to whether the emotion, which found its expression in the work he created, will reach the audience - even be understood by the audience - or not. The first and sometimes the only audience in Collingwood's account is the artist himself.

Collingwood makes also the distinction between 'arousing an emotion' and 'expressing emotion' in order to support his claim that the audience need not necessarily share the artist's feeling: 'A person arousing emotion sets out to affect his audience in a way in which he himself is not necessarily affected. He and his audience stand in quite different relations to the act. A person expressing emotion, on the contrary, is treating himself and his audience in the same kind of way; he is making his emotions clear to his audience, and that is what he is doing to himself. It follows from this that the expression of emotion, simply as expression, is not addressed to any particular audience. It is addressed primarily to the speaker himself, and secondarily to anyone who can understand.'<sup>176</sup> To sum up, Collingwood, having realized the difficulty with the view that the audience must share the same feeling expressed by the artist in the work, disengages the artist from the audience, and also the work from the artist. The artist creates the work because she feels the urge to express her feelings. The work should, as a

---

<sup>176</sup> Collingwood, 1938, pp.110-1.



consequence, be an expression of these feelings, irrespective of whether there is an audience or not, or whether the audience shares the same feelings or not.

Noël Carroll extensively discusses this issue of the relationship between artist and audience. He argues that initially the view that an audience is not necessary in order for someone to be able to make art seems right. However, he continues, even if the artist decides to destroy his work before anyone sees it, he has shown an intention to communicate by choosing 'a publicly accessible medium' to express his emotions. We can say then that artists create works 'intended in principle for audiences, without having any particular existing audience in mind' and this is true. Someone may then suggest the possibility of an artist's creating in a completely inaccessible medium – e.g. in a private language. But if an artist creates something completely incomprehensible to everyone else, it is extremely unlikely that this would be regarded as a work of art; as it seems that art requires 'some, if not minimal, public accessibility'.<sup>177</sup>

To return to the distinction between 'arousing' and 'expressing' emotion, Collingwood does not allow for the possibility of the artist's having no feelings at all while creating a work. We cannot find valid arguments to support the claim that feelingless artists cannot make art. They may merely know how to use certain forms to create a particular feeling in the audience. Of course, the proponents of the expression theory can argue that taking into consideration human nature, it is impossible for a work of art to be created without any feeling, since human beings are always in an emotional state: a feelingless artist cannot exist. Carroll raises two main objections to this argument. Firstly 'it does not seem true that we are always in some emotional state or other, and, thus there is no reason to predict that an artist is always in an

---

<sup>177</sup> Carroll, 1999, pp.67-8.

emotional state.' And secondly, even if we accept that an artist is always in an emotional state while creating a work, this does not mean that he is trying to clarify the state he is in, or even that he is aware of his emotional state at the time of the creative activity, as Collingwood is suggesting.<sup>178</sup>

Gordon Graham raises a value-related objection which is relevant here. He argues that if the artist is not expressing emotion, but formulates expressive representations of it, whose imaginative expression he appreciates, neither the artist nor the audience reaches any level of self-knowledge, which supposedly constitutes the value of art.<sup>179</sup> This remark forces us to go back to the distinction that was mentioned earlier between 'being expressive of' and 'being an expression of'. According to the everyday version of the theory a specific emotion can be attributed to a particular work of art, so the work is the expression of this specific emotion and its appreciation rests upon the audience's experiencing that emotion. If we replace the phrase 'the work is the expression' with the phrase 'the work is expressive of' a specific emotion, as a consequence the appreciation of the work would stem from the level of awareness of that emotion reached by the audience. As Graham puts it 'Being brought to a heightened awareness of an emotion does not imply undergoing an element of that emotion. For example I may to date be unaware of the intensity of your jealousy until one day you hit upon an especially expressive word or gesture. Then I appreciate your jealousy, but I do not share any of it. The expressiveness of your gesture can make me aware of your emotional state without engendering any emotion whatever in me.'<sup>180</sup> What is important here is that by replacing the phrase 'being an expression of' with 'being expressive of' we actually abandon expressivism

---

<sup>178</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.71.

<sup>179</sup> Graham, 1997, p.36.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*, p.37.

altogether. If art is credited with the heightening of awareness, the relation between art and emotion is broken, because art is able to heighten our awareness of many other things besides emotion. The central tenet of expressivism is thus abandoned. It is difficult to see how Collingwood could escape from this fatal criticism.

Another factor, which differentiates Collingwood's from Tolstoy's and Croce's expressivism, is the importance of imagination. Imagination in Collingwood's account plays an important role in contrast to its exclusion in Tolstoy's account. According to Collingwood, art proper involves two equally important elements, expression and imagination. The artist's vague and uncertain emotion is transformed into articulate expression by imaginative construction. As he describes it, the process of artistic creation is thus not a case of trying to manifest (externalize) what exists internally, which is how the everyday version describes the whole procedure, but a process of imaginative discovery; even better, an imaginative self-discovery.

Collingwood's account is still very broad. He says: 'Every utterance and every gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art.'<sup>181</sup> Everyone is an artist. Collingwood may have made the step of including the role of imagination in the artistic process of the creation of a work of art, but his main criterion, expression, does not help us to distinguish with clarity what is art and what is not.

It seems also that Collingwood extends the idea of emotion to such an extent as to lose its utility, despite the fact that his sophisticated version avoids what we might call the psychologism of the everyday version. He initially claims that the world of the artist is charged

---

<sup>181</sup> On the other hand, 'craft' is a representation, since it involves manipulating raw materials in a service of a goal known before the execution of the work begins. There is no process of clarification of expression of feelings in the creation of a craft.

with emotion. After introducing the notion of imagination, he ends up refuting that claim. In other words, he wants to suggest that artists are concerned with the 'imaginative presentation of the immediate experience'. This, though, omits emotion altogether and shows that because of the modifications to which it was subjected Collingwood's theory was driven beyond expressivism to become an account of art as a distinctive way of understanding human experience.<sup>182</sup>

His version of expressivism has, on the other hand, an advantage, which is very important to us when it is related to the art of dance. 'A work of art need not be what we should call a real thing. It may be what we call an imaginary thing. But a work of art may be completely created when it has been created as a thing whose only place is in the artist's mind.'<sup>183</sup> Collingwood assumes that, since works of art are acts of imagination and hence must be recreated in the minds of their audience, it is wrong to consider only material objects as works of art, for example paintings or sculptures. Obviously some works of art are not material at all, and a piece of dance is one such.<sup>184</sup> With this claim he does not want to imply, as some interpreters of Collingwood's work wished to assume, that art is all in the mind.<sup>185</sup>

An appraisal of the expression theories of art as they have been briefly presented here is that they are superior to representational theories of art, mainly because they are more

---

<sup>182</sup> This is a completely different approach to the problem of the definition of art: the consideration of art as a source of understanding. The best-known exponent of this theory is Nelson Goodman. This account of art will not concern us in this project.

<sup>183</sup> Collingwood, 1938, p.139.

<sup>184</sup> Collingwood gives the example of a piece of music that can exist only in the musician's head. 'If 'work of art' means work of art proper, a piece of music is not something audible, but something which may exist solely in the musician's head. To some extent it must exist solely in the musician's head (including, of course, the audience as well as the composer under that name), for his imagination is always supplementing, correcting and expurgating what he actually hears. The music, which he actually enjoys as a work of art, is thus never sensually or 'actually' heard at all. It is something imagined. But it is not imagined sound. It is an imagined experience of total activity. Thus a work of art proper is a total activity, which the person enjoying it apprehends, or is conscious of, by the use of his imagination.' *ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>185</sup> We should also bear in mind the point made by Carroll about whether works of art can exist entirely on the artist's head or not and the implications that this has for the expression theory.



comprehensive. Not only can they accommodate the subjective stylistics of art since Romanticism, but they can also contribute to our understanding of the art of the past. We should agree that Romanticism drew our attention to the artist's role in the creation of a work of art – to the extent that a work of art materializes the artist's attitudes, feelings, emotions and point of view toward her subject. Once attention had been drawn to the subjective dimension of artistic creations, such features could also be distinguished in earlier works of art.

In respect of their comprehensiveness, expression theories are more elaborated than the imitation and representational theories previously presented. Moreover expression theories of art also suggest a fundamental role for art, which has similarities with the role of science. If we agree that science is preoccupied with the exploration of the outer world of nature and human behaviour, art is concerned with the exploration of the inner world of feelings. Consequently, expression theories of art not only explain what makes something art in a more comprehensive manner than previously suggested theories but it also explains why art is so important to us.

Expressivism derives a large part of its appeal from the fact that most people find works of art moving, and enjoy being moved by them. We can argue that people like being moved and as a consequence value the works which move them solely by virtue of this fact, but this does not constitute an explanation, or even worse a criterion, for the distinctiveness of art.

In the next section we discuss how the notion of expression as outlined in the discussion of these three versions of expressivism can be related to the particular dance genres and to the art of dance in general.

## 5.6. Expression and the Dances

The cases of romantic and classical ballet can be treated together in relation to expression. Their symbolic space is not influenced by the abstract idea of expressing emotions or feelings. The intention of the choreographer is to communicate the feelings and emotions of the characters of the story that is being told in movement. The movements are thus only expressive of the particular feelings and emotions of the characters of the story but not those of the choreographer nor of the dancers. It can also be argued that the movements are expressive of feelings and emotions to the extent that they are also mimetic. The communication of the story and the notions of beauty and harmony dictate the way in which the symbolic space will be transformed into physical space. As a result the expressive elements of the movements are not a priority. Both these genres are characterized by expressiveness, restricted to a certain extent by the story that is being told. This is a typical example of works being expressive of certain feelings and not 'expressions of feelings' *per se*. The audience feels sympathy for the imaginary characters of the ballet through the representation of situations on the stage which are unconnected with the feelings and emotional state of the choreographer or the dancers.

The case of neoclassical ballet is a better example of expressiveness in dance. The expression of emotions and feelings might not be the primary intention of the choreographer but it definitely falls within the scope of the dance she creates. In some cases the movements are expressive of the emotions which were aroused for the choreographer by the music used for a particular dance piece. This is not always the case - the choreographer might choose the

music afterwards to accompany the emotional state that she wants to communicate. What is certain is that in the created dance there are feelings which need somehow to be communicated first to the dancers who will execute the movements and embody them, and then to the spectators. (Whether of course the *same* feelings are communicated to and felt by the audience is another matter.) Neoclassical ballet, as a result, is partly expressive and partly an expression of feelings and emotions.

Isadora Duncan's creations can be characterized as expressive but not of feelings and emotions. They are expressive to the extent that they stress the importance of naturalism in dance. She is not at all preoccupied with the idea of expression of feelings and emotions. Her dances are dictated by her constant demand for natural beauty. Again, whatever emotions are aroused in the spectators is a completely different issue and do not characterize the dances themselves.

On the other hand, Rudolf Laban is concerned with achieving a greater degree of expressiveness in dance through constant experimentation. He is experimenting with movement in order to find how different emotions can be communicated without relating to them personally. It can seem as if he has a list of emotions in front of him and is trying to find the best way to embody them in movement. The symbolic space of his dances, as a consequence, is dominated by the idea of expression of emotions and feelings. Whether the particular feelings are always successfully communicated to the audience is questionable.

Martha Graham moves along the same lines. The main idea influencing the symbolic space of her dances is the communication of human feelings in an abstract way. Consequently her dances are expressions of different emotions in an attempt to present in movement the

major problems and questions of the human condition. Her works are perhaps the most representative example of expressiveness in dance.

Mary Wigman, on the contrary, is not at all preoccupied with the idea of expression. The stress is put on the formal elements of dance which highlight its autonomy. The possible expressive elements of her movements are only incidental. Cunningham's and Rainer's dances, as mentioned above, constitute counterexamples to expressivism.<sup>186</sup>

The same cannot be said, though, for Pina Bausch's creations. Feelings and emotions may be presented in the most extreme versions possible within the framework of surrealism and extravagance that characterizes her dances, but the movements are still expressive. The abstract idea of expression, of course, does not influence the symbolic space of her dances since she has other preoccupations.

As we have seen in this analysis, the abstract idea of expression of feelings and emotions influences only selected dance genres. At the same time, the majority of dances incorporate movements that are expressive of certain emotions. But as we shall see in the following section the clear correlation between the feelings of choreographer and of spectators which at least the everyday version of expressivism suggests, is rarely, if ever, true for dance.

---

<sup>186</sup> Although Carroll argues that they can be expressive in the broader sense of the term. They are expressive of ideas in the sense that they communicate ideas; in this case the idea of negating any expression of feeling. If this is the case, all dances are in some sense expressive of something. Here we are concerned with exploring whether all dances are expressive of feelings in the narrower sense that the term 'expression' is used in the theories presented above. (Carroll, 1981, pp.95-103.)



## 5.7. Dance and/ as Expression

There are three distinctive aspects in a dance: formal aspects, consisting of the movements of the dancers' bodies in space and their relation to other movements in the same or in other dances, mimetic aspects, which refer to what is taking place in a dance and how the dance can be related to the outside world, and expressive aspects, which are what the dance seeks to embody, 'the felt quality of the life that is perceived in the dance'.<sup>187</sup> When these latter aspects of dance are being emphasized, we tend to characterize a dance as being expressive of certain feelings or emotions. Sparshott claims in the fifth chapter of his book *A Measured Pace - Toward Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance*, that '[t]he dance must be danced as the dance of someone, and to dance a dance of no one is itself a powerfully expressive act.'<sup>188</sup> A lot of commentary can be generated from the above statement, which might appear confusing at first sight. We take the view that Sparshott here is simply saying that in a broad sense all dance expresses some sort of feeling, or even more broadly expresses 'something'. The idea springs from the common belief that a person in a state of euphoria feels the urge to express this by dancing and this is the origin of all dances. In other words dance has at the same time a function and a cause, namely that of expressing joy.<sup>189</sup>

There is a particular difference between dance and the other arts that makes a stronger case for expressivism. In the case of other forms of art there is scope to wonder why the artist has chosen the specific medium - colour, marble, musical tones - to express her feelings, but in dance the relation between what somebody feels and her body seems more direct. The

---

<sup>187</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.84.

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>189</sup> August Bournoville, *My Theatre Life*, vol. 2, trans. by Patricia N. McAndrews (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1979).

dancer embodies feelings, although they are mostly feelings that the choreographer wants to express. In the majority of cases the dancer's feelings are not concerned, except when dancers work together with choreographers in the creation of a piece. The traditional view, though, is that the choreographer is the creator of dance and the dancer its executor.<sup>190</sup> Of course, one may ask what feelings are expressed in a particular dance and how this differentiates one dance from another. But do dancers always know what their dance expresses? We can plausibly claim that dancers and choreographers know exactly what their dance is about, but the only reason that justifies a claim that they also know what it expresses is the fact that they are more familiar with that particular dance than any of us. Sparshott says at this point that 'If what the dance expresses is not what is intended or referred to by it, but an aspect of what is manifest in it, that is something that can be observed only in and after the fact.'<sup>191</sup>

These considerations do not give any advance to the expressive elements of a dance against the other elements. They just affirm the modest claim that expression of feelings and emotions is one of the aspects of dance - as it could be an aspect of any given work of art.<sup>192</sup>

---

<sup>190</sup> The relation between choreographer and dancer is discussed in detail in Chapter 2 'The Creation of Dance - Choreography'.

<sup>191</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.86.

<sup>192</sup> It is worth mentioning here the article by Mary Sirridge and Adina Armelagos 'The In's and Out's of Dance: Expression as an Aspect of Style', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36 (1977): 15-24, where they suggest that even a modified expression theory, according to which the dancer expresses a feeling or emotion, but need not actually possess it and the audience apprehends that feeling or emotion, but need not come to share it, is wrong. Even ballet dancers learn their movements as movements, not as gestures for articulating emotion. In short, we are assured that expression of emotion is not a main preoccupation of the dancers when they perform.

### 5.7.1. John Martin's Account of *Expressive (Modern) Dance*

The dance critic, John Martin, based his whole theory of dance and its appreciation – his main preoccupation being with modern dance - on the idea that dance must be expressive if it is not to be merely mimetic and hence trivial and inauthentic.<sup>193</sup> Martin makes the distinction between 'fine' and merely 'decorative' arts, obviously assuming that the former are carriers of a deeper meaning, what Collingwood characterizes as 'art proper'. Martin's main principle is that emotional experience can express itself through movement directly.

Martin puts this very clearly - and manages to embody in another sense the notion of the correlation between the feelings of the dancers/choreographers and the audience: the physical impact itself of dance movement.

The (modern) dancer, instead of employing the cumulative resources of academic tradition... utilizes the principle that every emotional state tends to express itself in movement, and that the movements thus created spontaneously, though they are not representational, reflect accurately in each case the character of the particular emotional state. Because of the inherent contagion of bodily movement, which makes the onlooker feel sympathetically in his own musculature the exertions he sees in somebody else's musculature, the dancer is able to convey through movement the most intangible emotional experience. This is the prime purpose of the modern dance; it is not interested in spectacle, but in the communication of emotional experiences - intuitive perceptions, elusive truths - which cannot be communicated in reasoned terms or reduced to mere statement of fact.<sup>194</sup>

In other words, movement is the medium of the transference of an aesthetic and emotional concept from the consciousness of one individual to that of another. Martin, while expounding his theory on modern dance, had constantly in mind the notion of the ancient Greek word *metakinesis*, whose origins can be found as far back as Plato. The idea that rests

---

<sup>193</sup> See Sparshott's view on the issue as presented in the previous chapter.

<sup>194</sup> John Martin, *The Modern Dance in Theory with a New Introduction by Jack Anderson*, (Princeton: Dance Horizons, 1965) pp.141-2.

behind the notion of *metakinesis* is that there is a correlation between the physical and the psychical as these are supposed to be two aspects of a single underlying reality. Of course much can be said about the debate on the relation between the two - the physical and the psychical - but this issue verges on metaphysics and cannot be discussed here. He suggests is that each composition is based on 'a vision of something in human experience that touches the sublime.' This vision in order to be comprehended by others should acquire a form, namely the form of the movement, which is being generated 'by feeling through a sensitive body'.<sup>195</sup>

### 5.7.2. Objection to Martin's Account

What Martin seems to suggest is that when the dancer expresses her feelings through movement, the spectator with the contribution of *metakinesis* can feel those same feelings. The idea appears somewhat obscure. It is plausible to argue that the movements of the dancer become intelligible to us partly because we are aware of our own bodily movements; but to claim that the feelings can be communicated from the dancer to the spectator through movement in such a close correlation is difficult to accept.

As a consequence the objection to Martin's expression theory of *metakinesis* is quite commonsensical. How can the feeling that is being aroused in the spectator be the counterpart of the dancer's personal feeling? The dancer is expressing the choreographer's feelings rather than her own (although she is surely in general harmony with the choreographer's intentions), and it could well be that on occasion her personal feelings are at odds with those she has to

---

<sup>195</sup> John Martin, *Introduction to the Dance* (New York Dance Horizons, 1975) p.59.



convey.<sup>196</sup> (It could also be the case that the choreographer has never danced the particular piece and so has not physically experienced the feelings she intends her choreographed movements to convey.) There are also practical matters that should be considered: for example, how can a single spectator 'feel' a *pas-de-deux*, since she cannot simulate the movements of both dancers simultaneously?

## 5.8. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we related the notion of expression to dance. We gave an explanation of the term 'expression' by briefly presenting three versions of expressivism and raising some objections to the theories then discussed. Through the analysis of the specific examples of dance genres it was made clear that not all dances are expressions of feelings, although even in such cases isolated movements can be expressive of emotions.

There is no doubt that one of the dimensions of dance is expression of some sort of feeling or emotion. But it is not the only one, not even the most fundamental one, as the expression theorists want to suggest. Of course the degree of expression can vary between different dance pieces. In some cases, the symbolic space of the dance is influenced by the idea of expression but in the majority of cases only the movements are expressive of certain feelings without the whole dance being concerned with them. However it does not necessarily follow from this that every dance must be expressive of something (a certain feeling); and more

---

<sup>196</sup> We should not forget that the dancer is like the actress and, no matter what, she has to appear on stage and perform her part. If her role is to be joyful, she should pretend to be so, even if she is feeling grief-stricken on the day of the performance.

importantly something that can be identified. Noël Carroll states<sup>197</sup> that some post-modern choreographers wish to create works that are 'non-expressive or even anti-expressive': many works of Balanchine and Cunningham are in this category. These dances are neither representational nor expressive. In other words, they are not referring to events, feelings or emotions. 'These dances are meant to show nothing above and beyond the specific movements employed in making the given dance.'<sup>198</sup> Yvonne Rainer's choreographies are very relevant here.

The expression theory has not proved a helpful tool for the distinction that we try to draw between dance and everyday movement. As was shown, there are non-expressive or anti-expressive dances and there are also movements that are expressive but are not classified as dance movements. It should be noted, of course, that in the first case the particular non-expressive dances were perhaps created with the purpose of blurring the boundaries between art and non-art, actually to create confusion and raise questions about the nature of this artistic form. In relation to the second distinction between dance and gymnastics, the expression theory is considered to be helpful, to a certain extent. Gymnastics are generally not expressive of feelings and emotions, while dance is. But this distinction is very case specific, since certain gymnastic demonstrations have a strong artistic character and certain dances are, as we have seen, anti-expressive.

The relation of dance and expression of emotions is another non-exclusive one, despite its initial appeal and its advantages in relation to the previously examined notions. In the next

---

<sup>197</sup> Carroll, 1981. See footnote 186 for his main argument that these dances are actually expressive in the broader sense of the term.

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*, p.96.

chapter we consider the notion of form, since it was made evident from the analysis of the particular genres that that is central to the art of dance.

## 6. Dance as (Pure) Form

*"Movement Never Lies".*

*"Dancing is Movement made divinely significant".*

Martha Graham, 1932

### 6.1. Introduction

Throughout our discussion of dance and the analysis of the specific examples of dance genres, it has been clear that the notion of form is closely related to that of dance and in particular, to that of modern abstract dance.<sup>199</sup> Consequently in this chapter we are interested in exploring how this notion of form can be related to the art of dance. Towards this, we attempt first to make the term 'form' more intelligible (form is another notion difficult to define) through a brief presentation of the formalistic theory of art with special reference to Clive Bell's account of 'significant form'. We are not so much concerned as to whether the theory of art as form in general provides a satisfactory account of art but with the abstracted idea of 'form' that can derive from it and the relation of the latter with classical ballet and modern dance. The close relation of the notion of form with the notion of content is relevant to our discussion as well. This is explored within the framework of the theory of neoformalism, which allows the inclusion of content in the whole discussion about art, an aspect that is neglected by the traditional version of the theory. Consequently we look at how and to what extent the notion of form influences the symbolic and physical space of the different dance genres and whether form can be considered the sole characteristic of dance.

---

<sup>199</sup> A point that will be made more fully in Section 6.5 of the current chapter where we discuss in detail the relation between the set examples and the notion of form as far as their symbolic and physical space is concerned.



The particular case of André Levinson is interesting. Levinson argues that dance is neither imitation nor expression and theories that support these views attribute to dance a function outside itself.<sup>200</sup> He claims that dance is pure form and it is misleading to conceive the dancer's steps as gestures imitating character or expressing emotions or feelings. Always, according to his views, the creation of a dance piece stems from a main idea, from the inspiration of the choreographer. This idea has to take a (physical) form in order to be communicated. This is no different from what we are suggesting about the transformation of symbolic to physical space. It does not follow though that the dance should be constituted solely from formal elements. In a work of art, form can have a double role: it can either be the carrier of the message or the message itself. For example, in classical art, the form is at the same time the intention, the message and the aesthetic quality of a work of art. As far as dance is concerned the abstracted idea of form can both influence the symbolic space of the dance and at the same time be manifested in movement that underlines the formal qualities of the dance, though this is not always the case. An attention to the formal qualities of movement may coexist with the intention to communicate the abstract notion of beauty, as in the case of classical ballet.

Levinson believes that the beauty of dance can be found only in the movement itself. No doubt Levinson's formalism can give an attractive account for the work of choreographers, such as Yvonne Rainer, but we shall see that it is inadequate if we consider the various different examples of ballet and modern dance. Margaret H'Doubler<sup>201</sup> provides us with a

---

<sup>200</sup> André Levinson, 'The Idea of the Dance: From Aristotle to Mallarmé', repr. in Copeland and Cohen, 1983. p.5

<sup>201</sup> Margaret H'Doubler, *Dance – a Creative Experience* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). She was a professor of dance at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she taught for 44 years. In 1926 she established the first dance major in the country and profoundly influenced the way dance is taught in schools and universities.

broader account of formalism that seems more plausible, as she allows for the presence of other elements in dance, while giving the leading role to formal aspects.

We shall conclude by considering whether the notion of form provides us with satisfactory answers to the initial questions on the distinction between dance and everyday movement and dance and gymnastics, and whether a formalistic attitude towards dance can contribute to our understanding and appreciation of it.

In presenting the formalist theories, we need to clarify our attitude towards the suggested approach of dance as form. The general view that works of art have form does not constitute a serious objection for us. However this claim is vague and general. Formalism claims that form constitutes the criterion as to whether something is a work of art or not. And this is our main objection to this approach: the obsession with discovering a sufficient and necessary condition for art. On the contrary, the idea that form is one of the characteristics of art is not only plausible but appealing as well, particularly in the case of dance. One cannot deny that dance possesses formal elements. The objection again is that dance is not or cannot be purely formal (as Levinson for example is suggesting), since there are other elements that contribute to what we call and understand as dance. Despite these methodological objections, the formal theories are here presented in an analytic way following the lines of argument of their supporters.

Further, the notion of form is closely related to content in the sense that form is the container and content the contained. Form gives shape to content, while the content can influence the choice of a particular form. The neoformalist's view that the content of a work of art is actually its meaning, whatever it is about, and that the form is the way of the presentation and embodiment of this meaning, is very helpful for dance. The physical space of the dance

can be regarded as the form (the actual movements that give shape to the meaning that the choreographer wants to communicate) while the symbolic space is the content of the dance. We do not object to this analogy. What we disagree with is the claim that dance is pure form and that form is the only characteristic of dance. Even in the case of abstract dances, the very idea of achieving purity in movement influences the physical space of the dance, the choice of the particular movements that will embody the notion of formal purity. As a consequence dance is not pure movement, pure form; though formal elements constitute an important part of any dance.<sup>202</sup>

## 6.2. Formalism

The movement of formalism in the arts is closely connected to what is more commonly known to us as modern art or modernism.<sup>203</sup> Like the expression theory of art, it arose as a reaction to representational theories of art. Formalism has a tendency towards abstraction.<sup>204</sup> To be more specific, formalism not only takes into consideration the formal elements of an artwork, it confers on them the most important role. The aim of the artists who are characterized as modern and work within the framework of formalism is 'not to capture the perceptual appearances of the world, but often to make images noteworthy for their visual

---

<sup>202</sup> This view is analyzed in more detail and supported in Section 6.5 of this chapter, where we discuss the notion of form in relation to the various dance genres.

<sup>203</sup> According to Steven Connor in Cooper, 1992, 'Modernist aesthetics is characterized by the attempt to define the nature of aesthetic experience in itself. In twentieth-century avant-garde modernism, this conception is joined with a revolutionary commitment to endless experiment and innovation in artistic form... Modernism stresses the unity and autonomy of the work of art, with both radical and conservative consequences...' (p.188).

<sup>204</sup> According to Crispin Sartwell in Cooper, 1992, abstraction is the 'absence of representation. In painting and sculpture, pure abstraction consists in the absence of representative elements, elements which recognizably resemble items in the external world and which the work is intended to portray.' (p.1).

organization, form and arresting design'.<sup>205</sup> Historically, the evolution of this form of modern art can be traced from the invention of photography. By the end of the nineteenth century it seemed as if photography could replace imitative painting. So artists - mainly painters and sculptors - were forced to come up with a new style. Abstraction was the solution - or at least one of the solutions - to their problem.

As a result artworks, paintings in particular, became nonobjective. Noël Carroll describes this new movement on the artistic scene as 'Rather than looking into it or through it, they turned their attention at it.... This was painting for the sake of painting – painting that experimented with the possibilities of shape, line, and colour – not painting for the sake of showing the world.'<sup>206</sup>

Impressionists made the first step: they were the first to break the solidity of the image, but still one could recognize some objects in their paintings. Cézanne carried the experimentation one step forward by 'reducing objects to their underlying, geometrical shapes.'<sup>207</sup> Cubism followed and marked the 'great' period of modern abstract art. But this new movement in the arts required a theoretical background, a theory to support it. This theoretical scaffolding was provided by Clive Bell's book *Art*<sup>208</sup> which taught generations of viewers how to understand and appreciate modern art. Despite its flaws this book initiated a revolution in artistic taste.

---

<sup>205</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.108.

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*, pp.108-9.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*, p.109.

<sup>208</sup> Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus 1923).



### 6.3. Clive Bell's Formalism – 'Significant Form'

Bell wanted to argue that since all works of visual art provoke a special kind of emotion (the particular emotion is not of course the same but differs for each work) that can be called 'aesthetic emotion', should we manage to discover a quality which is 'common and peculiar to all objects that provoke it (this particular emotion)' we shall be able to solve the 'central problem of aesthetics'; namely 'we shall have discovered the essential quality in a work of art, the quality that distinguishes works of art from other classes of objects.'<sup>209</sup> In other words, Bell is trying to establish a single criterion for art.<sup>210</sup> According to him there is only one: 'Significant Form'.<sup>211</sup> He goes on to say that he will show that this quality is common to all works of art past, present and future, but its importance was only made apparent because of modern art's tendency towards abstraction, which emphasizes the 'mastery' of form.<sup>212</sup>

Commenting on this idea of significant form, Carroll suggests that what Bell wants to claim is that 'Genuine art addresses the imagination like the figures of Gestalt psychology, prompting the viewer to fill the artwork in such a way that we apprehend it as an organized configuration of lines, colours, shapes spaces, vectors and so on.'<sup>213</sup> In other words it is the

---

<sup>209</sup> Bell, 1923, p.7.

<sup>210</sup> Or as he says, 'Why are we so profoundly moved by some combinations of lines and colours?' *ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>211</sup> Bell's definition of significant form is clear and straightforward: '... [L]ines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call *Significant Form*; and *Significant Form* is the one quality common to all works of visual art.' *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>212</sup> Bell's view that there is a particular 'aesthetic emotion' that the various works of art provoke in their viewers and that 'significant form' is the sole criterion of art reminds us of Kant's view on beauty, namely that the pleasure that is generated from beauty is different from any other kind of pleasure that we might feel and as a consequence should be universal. Kant attributes this aesthetic quality to beauty, Bell to significant form, but their line of argument stems from the same idea: that there must be something common to all works of art that makes them distinct and as a consequence there must be a single criterion for art. As it will be argued in the next chapter we consider the whole endeavour of discovering a single criterion for art (and therefore a definition of art) not only hopeless but also useless.

<sup>213</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.109.

unified structure of some works that make them art. These Gestalt properties capture our attention and 'force' us to consider the ways in which the composition of the different elements interacts with our perceptual capacity and at the same time motivates us to explore our sensibility – to notice, for example, certain line and colour arrangements when we are in front of a painting. In this way, formalism overcomes the problem which modern abstract art posed for representational and expressive theories of art. By emphasizing the structure, formalism can account for non-objective and non-figurative artworks. It has also another advantage: it succeeds in showing the value of, and a way of appreciation of, non-imitative artworks from non-Western cultures, such as tribal art. As a consequence, formalism seemed to be 'the comprehensive theory of the nature of all art'.<sup>214</sup> From this perspective art could also be representational; the only difference being that representation is considered (by formalists) to be an incidental and not an essential property of a work of art. According to formalists, 'Form is all that makes the difference.' It should not come as a surprise that it was claimed that formalism changed how people thought about art; previously the possession of some highly representational content was the only criterion to classify certain works as artworks. But this is not the only reason why formalism became so attractive. Even artists who dared to remove the expressive qualities from their work with the intention of creating purely formalistic works, such as Yvonne Rainer's abstract dances, could be - under the influence of formalism - highly appreciated.<sup>215</sup>

To say that all artworks do seem to possess form is a view commonly expressed and has been accepted without serious objections being raised to it. Especially in the case of dance, form is the first notion that comes to mind since the main component of dance,

---

<sup>214</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.110.

<sup>215</sup> The same example was used in the previous chapter to show the limitations of the expression theories of art.

movement, can be characterized primarily in relation to its formal properties. How else can movements be characterized but as forms?<sup>216</sup>

But unfortunately there are many things that are not art that also possess significant form. Once again we have a condition too broad for our purpose. At this point, distinguishing the function of artworks in contrast to other things, can save the formalist doctrine. The formalist can claim that art is distinct from other (intentional) activities as far as it is uniquely concerned with displaying form.<sup>217</sup> In support of this view it can be added that only art among all other human activities demonstrates the exhibition of form as its special characteristic and value. It is this preoccupation with the exploration of form that determines the boundaries between art and the other human practices. Undoubtedly art may be concerned with representational themes - such as religious, political, moral or philosophical issues - but what makes art special is that above all 'it is concerned with discovering formal structures that are designed to encourage our imaginative interplay with them'.<sup>218</sup> A formalist could also claim that works of art contain moral and other kinds of representational content just to prompt the exhibition of formal properties. To sum up, the formalists claim that a necessary and sufficient condition for art is that a work of art is something created with the primary function<sup>219</sup> of exhibiting significant form. So something is a work of art if it possesses significant form and if something possesses significant form it is an artwork.

---

<sup>216</sup> This is the main idea that rests behind all the dance pieces - and of all the accompanying theories - that were and are still being created with the sole intention to demonstrate the pureness of movement. As will be demonstrated in Section 6.5 these dances are in the majority of cases created in order to manifest the ideals of a formalist approach to art in general and dance in particular.

<sup>217</sup> Natural objects display form but there are not the products of an intentional activity or creation. The formalists presuppose that works of art are the products of the creative activity of the artist.

<sup>218</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.113.

<sup>219</sup> By the term 'function' here we refer to the purpose that the work is intended to fulfil. This clarification is necessary for two reasons: firstly, if the notion of the intentional activity is not added, then natural beauties will be classified as artworks, since they may possess significant form, despite the fact that they are not artworks; secondly, if the possession of significant form was the only criterion, many works of art would not qualify because the artist may have failed to invest his work with significant form.



Despite its many, and rather straightforward advantages, we can still question whether formalism constitutes an adequate and comprehensive theory of all art. It seems that we should first question whether the primary intention to exhibit significant form is a necessary property of all art. A quick survey of the history of art would suggest that it is not. Most traditional art is religious or political. It glorifies gods or saints, it commemorates important historical events or persons, and it aims to relate the members of a society to its common culture. Consequently, much art is primarily created to serve functions other than the exhibition of significant form. So (significant) form is not the primary intention of all artists and even if it is exhibited, that does not mean it is the sole characteristic of a work of art.

To this objection a formalist's possible reply could be that a work of art can have more than one function and these can co-exist. If a work of art is genuine, apart from any social function that it may fulfil the formalist will argue that it is created with the intention to exhibit significant form. This weaker position does not seem unreasonable, though it is over-ambitious on the formalist's behalf to claim that it is universally the case that the intention to exhibit significant form characterizes every artistic creation. Another possible solution to this difficulty would be to remove the notion of intentionality and stick to the requirement that works of art should possess and exhibit significant form. But this version also creates problems: firstly, it cannot account for the possibility of bad art. Carroll remarks 'Art may be bad because it lacks significant form, but it is still art. The imagined revision of the significant form requirement leaves us with no way to speak of bad art, but only 'nonart'. But bad art is not 'nonart'... Bad art is still art, though art of an inferior sort'.<sup>220</sup> Secondly, there is also a problem in relation to

---

<sup>220</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.117. The extent to which this is a problem for formalism rests on the view held in relation to whether the term 'work of art' is an honorific term or not. See the general discussion on good and bad art in Chapter 1, Section 1.5.



nature. Nature can have significant form, yet nature is not art. When the intention requirement is removed, the formalist should account nature as art and this is too inclusive.<sup>221</sup>

Another question that arises is, What is significant form after all? Clive Bell and his supporters provide us with a single criterion for art, but fail to give us a way to distinguish significant from insignificant form. They give us only examples not principles or axioms, which would not be a problem if they were not suggesting that all works of art share a single common criterion. They attempt to define art, but they end up with explications instead.<sup>222</sup> If we are to follow their way of thinking we need another criterion or a set of criteria in order to be in a position to say whether a form is significant or not. As Carroll puts it '...obscurity lies at the heart of formalism; the theory is useless, because its central term is undefined'.<sup>223</sup> We reach an impasse: in their attempt to define art, formalists suggested the notion of significant form, but for the definition to work they must now define what they mean by the term. To use one of Bell's phrases, we 'gibber' if we do not base our theories of art on an explicit definition of art; but ironically this is exactly what the formalists are doing in essence by replacing the term 'art' with 'significant form'.

A common answer to that objection is that if a work is arresting then it has significant form. But this is not good enough, because a work can be arresting for other reasons apart from formal ones. Another reply to the same objection is to say that significant form causes a special state of mind in viewers. But this is also unhelpful, unless that state of mind can be defined. The formalist cannot say that significant form causes a special state of mind in its percipients - the appreciation of significant form - because this is a circular definition. We need

---

<sup>221</sup> It is also manifestly absurd.

<sup>222</sup> The main objection is a methodological one; we object to the endeavour to find a single criterion/definition of art.

<sup>223</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.118.

to be assured that the *concept* of significant form is able to distinguish mental states which are, from mental states which are not, an appreciation of significant form. It is also quite implausible to assume that there is a single non-trivial mental state shared in all experiences of works of art. Once again we recognize the main problem of the whole approach. The search for explicit definitions is hopeless.

As a last resort, the formalist could say that we do not actually need a definition of significant form because everybody knows what it is about, everybody can feel it and discern it. It seems that we can apply the notion of significant form without having a definition of it. If somebody asks us to provide them with examples of works which manifest significant form we know what to look for – repeating motifs, strong contrasts, symmetries and so on.<sup>224</sup> But what are we going to do in the case of works like those by John Cage where the sounds have no predetermined formal order and the whole piece is based on improvisation techniques?<sup>225</sup> It seems that such works are formless - and we cannot even attribute failure to Cage in an intention to present significant form, because he wants to do exactly the opposite, namely to draw our attention to 'formlessness'. Cage's work shows that there can be, and indeed there are, formless works of art.

A formalist's reaction might be that these works are not really formless. It can be argued that when one understands the aim of the artist, one can see that their choices were appropriate. In such cases, it seems that form follows function. More specifically, Cage wanted to draw our attention to the ambient sounds of everyday life, and he achieved that. So his work

---

<sup>224</sup> These of course constitute already attempts to define significant form or suggest criteria to make it distinguishable.

<sup>225</sup> Consider as an example the piece called 4'33"; it is a set of instruction: the pianist should sit at the piano and open a score, but not strike a single key. The piece consists of all the ambient sounds that occur in four minutes and thirty three seconds. In other words, if someone in the audience coughs, their coughing becomes part of the piece. It is obvious from the above that each performance will be different from the other. According to Cage the aim of this piece is to draw our attention to those sounds of everyday life that we usually ignore.

does exhibit formal virtues. But this is not good enough since there are many things that have formal virtues that serve their function and are not works of art, milk cartons for example. To say that something is a work of art only if it possesses and exhibits form is too broad. Even if we go back to the earlier condition that something is art if and only if it is created only with the intention to possess and exhibit significant form, omitting the factor of function, we still do not have a criterion for art, as there are things that are designed to possess and exhibit significant form but are not works of art. Consider, for example, a mathematical proof or a game of chess.

One last objection to formalism arises from the formalist's claim that representation is always strictly irrelevant to art status. This is mistaken because in many cases artworks possess and exhibit significant form just because of their representational content. Form is closely related to, and sometimes even depends on content, as we shall show later in this chapter. To illustrate that we can resort to literature, where the relation between the two is more evident. For example we cannot talk about tragic structure in a literary work without some consideration of what is being represented. In this case the content influences the form of the work.

#### **6.4. Neoformalism – 'Form is the very shape of content.' Ben Shahn<sup>226</sup>**

From what has been already discussed, it seems that one of the major problems of the formalist theory of art is the fact that the relevance of content to art status is completely ignored. As a consequence an obvious modification of formalism is to try to include content in

---

<sup>226</sup> Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972): 'I would not ordinarily undertake a discussion of form in art, nor would I undertake a discussion of content. To me, they are inseparable. Form is formulation - the turning of content into material entity, rendering a content accessible to others, giving it permanence, willing it to the race... Form and content have been forcibly divided by a great deal of present-day aesthetic opinion, and each... goes its separate way.' (p.53).

the whole discussion about art. And this is exactly what neoformalism does: content becomes a necessary condition for art. Of course, content *per se* cannot be a satisfactory criterion for art. Something must also possess form. But we can easily find things that are not artworks, which still possess both form and content. So what the neoformalists want to suggest, and they actually do so, is that something is a work of art if and only if it has both form and content, and these are both related to each other in a satisfyingly appropriate manner.

In order to understand that phrase, we need first to explore the possible ways in which content and form can relate to each other. When we talk about form and content, it is usual to think of the analogy between a container and what it contains. Form is the container which gives shape to content and content is what is contained. But in the case of art, this analogy does not help, because it seems impossible to distinguish between what is contained and a container. The content of a piece of music, for example, cannot exist without the musical structures. Yet the analogy container/contained assumes that the two terms (form and content) can be separated.

The neoformalist offers another explanation of their relation. The content of the work of art refers to its meaning, its theme, whatever it is about, while the form is the way in which its meaning is presented, the way its meaning is embodied and articulated. It will also help our understanding of the two terms and their relation if we perceive the content as the essence of the work of art and the form as the mode of appearance of this essence.<sup>227</sup> Charles Olson, an influential poet in the years after World War II declared in the capital letters which he sometimes used when making such momentous pronouncements that 'FORM IS NEVER

---

<sup>227</sup> Aristotle's conception of the formal cause can help our understanding of the relation between form and content, as well as the neoformalist's explanation of what the phrase 'a satisfyingly appropriate manner' means. The form cannot exist without the content – in this case without the material cause, the matter. Both of them are joined to create the essence or The Form (Aristotle's terms for each). The concept of a unified entity could also be of assistance at this point.



MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT' (the phrase was actually borrowed from another poet, Robert Creeley).<sup>228</sup>

At this point we return and ask, what is 'a satisfyingly appropriate manner'? The neoformalist's reply is to say that form and content relate in a satisfyingly appropriate manner when the form matches the meaning, and when we reflect upon this match and we realize that form and content are harmoniously joined in a suitable way and this unity creates a satisfying feeling of completeness.

If this is the case, neoformalism has a number of advantages over formalism. To begin with, the fact that many works of art were created with the intention to serve religious, political or other purposes does not create a problem for neoformalism. These works are art as far as their purposes are articulated and presented in ways appropriate to their meaning/message. Neoformalism can also account for the expressive dimensions of works of art. When for example we say that a particular painting expresses sadness, neoformalism accepts the expression of sadness as the content of the work and then explores whether the formal means of the painting, in this particular instance, are suitable for articulating the expressive property (in this case, that of sadness).

Another advantage of neoformalism over formalism is that it can acknowledge cases like Cage's 4' 33", mentioned earlier, as art. If the aim, in other words the meaning, of Cage's piece is to show that everyday sounds are worth attending, then admittedly he chose a very effective way of presentation to promote that insight. He managed to arrange the whole performance in such a way that one cannot fail to listen to its ambient sound. The structure of the piece makes the manifestation of its meaning almost unavoidable. According to

---

<sup>228</sup> The reference comes from Jack Anderson, *Art Without Boundaries – The World of Modern Dance* (London: Dance Books, 1997) pp.196-7.

neoformalism 4'33" is a work of art, since it has a form, which is satisfyingly appropriate to its content.

The notion of the satisfying appropriateness of form to content seems 'more informative and less obscure'<sup>229</sup> than that of significant form. It is understandable that one cannot list every type of appropriate form, since new forms are constantly being discovered; after all that is what creativity is about. But the fact that the notion of appropriate form is closely related to the meaning of the work of art enables us, after identifying the meaning of the work, to determine whether it has been effectively and successfully articulated or not. Content directs our determination of appropriate form. When we are aware of the content, we are in a position to isolate the elements that are related to it and then assess the suitability of those elements. This approach is also very helpful in relation to dance. If we are right in saying that what is going on in dance is the transformation of symbolic space (i.e. the content) to physical space (i.e. form) and *vice versa*, we can then claim that the form and content of the dance are related to each other in a satisfyingly appropriate manner when the audience can understand the transformation and reverse it. This way the neoformalist's criterion is used as a tool to help us determine whether the communication of the message of the choreographer was successful or not.

It seems, apart from everything else, that overall neoformalism provides us with better explanations as far as certain distinctive features of artistic practices are concerned. One such feature is artistic change. Art is in constant flux and neoformalism can account for that. If the imitation theory of art were true, one would have expected the evolution of painting, for example, to cease as it became perfectly 'accurate'. Art is restless and new forms will surely

---

<sup>229</sup> Carroll, 1999, p.130.

always be developed. The neoformalist can explain that as human situations change, new issues arise, artists have new things to say and works of art have different/new meanings. New content means new forms; so artistic style keeps changing because the new content requires a search for new forms of articulation.

Closely connected to this explanation is the neoformalist's explanation of why we cherish art. New situations create new meanings, new ideas, and new content. Art articulates this content in ways that invite reflection. It embodies new values, as well as old values in contemporary times. And this is why art is so important to social and cultural life. In addition it makes sense of our critical and appreciative practices. Finally, neoformalism helps us understand what it is that artists *do*. Artists are experts in matching ways of presentation and meanings, in uniting form with content.

Despite these advantages, there are still problems with neoformalism. The first objection to neoformalism stems from the claim that something is a work of art if and only if it has content, a meaning. But one can argue that not all art possess a meaning. Some art is meaningless and its only purpose is to produce an effect on audiences, for example to delight by means of its mere appearance. This kind of art simply pleases the eye, and this is all that it is intended to do. But even if this is the case, the rhythms, the movements, the arrangements of the different elements that draw the attention of the audience, and please the eye, are the actual content. The artist uses these structures not only to move us in a certain way but at the same time to make us reflect upon them and the way they influence us. It can be argued that these structures address our human sensibilities and reveal their nature. Therefore, these works are about something, they are about human capacities and sensibilities and about their limitations as well. They have a meaning: they help us understand who and what we are. This

can be the case for many minimalist artists, but we have to allow for the possibility of art that engages us simply with its beauty, without inviting us to consider from whence this beauty springs. But still this does not mean that such works of art do not have a meaning. Their meaning is related to the pleasure they create for the viewer. Some minimalist art has the simple aim of stimulating our senses without intending to make us reflect on the nature of our sensibilities. In this case the neoformalist has won the argument. If we consider art to be some sort of communication, namely that the artist wants to influence the audience, then we cannot deny that all works of art have meaning: that is why they were produced.

Another objection the theory encounters is related to the case of bad art. This objection only stands for those who believe that a theory of art should accommodate bad art.<sup>230</sup> According to neoformalism, a work of art can be characterized as bad when it fails to find a satisfyingly appropriate form to correlate to its content. But this does not mean that it is not a work of art, it is just a bad artwork. It could be argued that neoformalism cannot account for that. Because according to the theory if something fails to find a satisfyingly appropriate form for its content, it is not a work of art at all. This implies that all works of art, according to the neoformalist's view are good. As a result, neoformalism is a commendatory and not a comprehensive classificatory theory of art. It is a theory that seems to overlook all bad art and is interested only in good art. The satisfying appropriateness of form to content cannot be a necessary condition of art since a theory of art must allow for the possibility of bad art as well.

A possible response to this objection is that the neoformalist allows for the possibility of bad art, when badness in art is a function of possessing very low degrees of satisfying appropriateness. Badness in this sense is defined as diminished goodness. Admittedly, it

---

<sup>230</sup> See the general discussion in Chapter 1 about the use of the terms 'art' and 'works of art'.



sounds paradoxical to claim that a satisfyingly appropriate match of form to content is bad. Somehow a notion of positive badness is introduced here. If we are to accept this, we have also to accept that no artwork is completely bad, it has some goodness. But how can we measure a sufficient amount of appropriateness so as to make something a work of art? The problem is even deeper. Satisfying appropriateness conceived in this way is a matter of degrees, but being a work of art may not be. It is ambiguous to use a degree concept to define whether something is art or is not, since we would have first to decide on a significance level of appropriateness.

An attempt to save neoformalism at this point would be to set a boundary according to which a work's amount of formal appropriateness will be sufficient to count as art. But still this limit will be arbitrary to anyone whose work falls below it and disputes will again arise along the border between art and non-art. So we have exactly the same problem as before: we need to find a non-arbitrary principle to determine the amount of degree of formal appropriateness that would be enough to characterize something as a work of art.

Another suggestion could be to introduce the notion of intention in our discussion. In this way, a work of art need not achieve a satisfyingly appropriate match of form to content, but only be intended to do so. Bad art would then be art where there was an intention to discover formal appropriateness, and the artist had failed. Unfortunately this would not save neoformalism. Think for example of the packaging of ordinary household products;<sup>231</sup> they have content, namely the product that they contain, about which they say something through carefully selected designs. They have a meaning that they communicate intentionally through

---

<sup>231</sup> Example given by Carroll, 1999, p.136.

their form. This is what commercial design is all about. The problem is that these are not, in general, works of art. Once again, neoformalism appears to be too inclusive.

The main, perhaps only, problem that neoformalists have, according to our view, is that as formalists, they try to find a single criterion for art, in other words an explicit definition for art. But this is not feasible since art is so diverse in its manifestations, especially today, when it is held that almost anything can be a work of art if it is rightly presented. There is so much variety among works of art that to look for a common characteristic shared by all works of art is hopeless. The Wittgensteinian idea of 'family resemblance' seems to be the only satisfactory approach. In rejecting the search for analytic definitions of aesthetic terms such as 'art' or 'work of art', Wittgenstein suggests that these terms are family resemblance concepts. There are no conditions which are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for the application of these terms. The latter are related in a multiplicity of ways, through a complicated network of overlapping similarities.<sup>232</sup>

In the following section we discuss how the notion of form as outlined above in relation to formalism and neoformalism can be related to the particular dance genres and to the art of dance in general.

## **6.5. Form and the Dances**

As with expression, the cases of romantic and classical ballet can be treated together in relation to form. Their symbolic space is not influenced by the abstract idea of form. These dances do not manifest pureness of form and by no means can their beauty be found in their

---

<sup>232</sup> A more detailed presentation of this view can be found in the next chapter, when art and dance in particular are related to the Wittgensteinian terms 'family resemblance' and 'form of life'.

form. These examples are as far away as they can be from what is characterized in formalist terms as pure dance. The movements tell a story and are put together in such a way as to communicate the abstract idea of grace and harmony.<sup>233</sup> Of course in this case the content - the symbolic space - does influence the physical space, the movements that do manifest some formal qualities. Lighting, scenery, and music play significant roles in the communication of their symbolic space to the audience. Movement is not the sole medium of the communication. On the other hand, the preoccupation with the perfect execution of movement and the faithful pursuit of the strict ballet technique implies an interest in the formal qualities of the movements, always in terms of the perfection and accuracy of their execution. The aim is to achieve perfection of execution and not to purify dance from external elements.<sup>234</sup> There is also a preoccupation with the appropriate sequence of movements that would successfully communicate the message to the audience.

Neoclassical ballet, in particular the works of George Balanchine, such as *Apollo*, is one of the characteristic examples that Clive Bell's formalism can account for. The absence of a scenario contributes to stressing the importance of movement. But neoclassical ballet is the ancestor of pure abstract dance. The abstract notion of form does not yet influence the symbolic space of the dance and does not constitute the main preoccupation of the creator. Music, lighting and costumes are still present, and the dance is not stripped of external elements. Balanchine's work incorporated sports, acrobatics, nightclub and show dancing, and is alien to a purely formalistic approach. These elements are used parasitically. There are other qualities to these ballets, although the preoccupation is with movement and ballet technique.

---

<sup>233</sup> Refer to the similar sections of Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>234</sup> See the next section on Levinson's views.

Isadora Duncan's work is entirely alien to the idea of pure form. Naturalism is the driving force. Of course to a certain extent form is achieved, but the notion of pure form neither influences the symbolic space of the dance nor is the main element of the dance movements. It is one of the elements, but not even a central one. Duncan's creations are a characteristic example of content (naturalism) influencing form. Form is used as a medium for the communication of the content, and it cannot be characterized as pure.

In the work of Rudolf Laban we find the first seeds of what will later evolve into pure abstract dance. His experimentation with movement is an indication. The introduction of improvisation and the almost complete absence of music in the dance also contribute to that. The manifestation of the formal elements of dance starts gaining ground in relation to other elements. Mary Wigman, as Laban's student, carried further the explorations of her teacher, focusing on specific movements or sequences of movements such as the dynamics between tension and relaxation. It is now obvious that movement is primary and all other elements of the dance performance are secondary.<sup>235</sup> The abstract idea of form in this case influences the symbolic and physical space of the dance and the choreographer wants to communicate it to the audience.

Martha Graham, on the contrary, presents us with the other side of modern dance. She is concerned with exploring the principles of contraction and relief and the pull of gravity in movement but these are not her only preoccupations. She wanted to communicate the American pioneer spirit and to deal in an abstract way with human feelings. Her dances demonstrate formal qualities but not exclusively.

---

<sup>235</sup> The majority of her dances are performed in silence.



John Cage, the close collaborator of Merce Cunningham, has already been mentioned. Unsurprisingly, Cunningham's works are the most characteristic example of modern abstract dance. He used chance procedures and computer programs to make decisions for his creations in order to strip from dance any external element. As a consequence his movements manifest strongly formal elements. All other elements are secondary. That is why his dances are characterized as iconoclastic. The idea of form influences the symbolic space of his dances and is successfully communicated to the audience. Form is omnipresent in both physical and symbolic space. Movement and dance are in a sense purified.

In his steps followed Yvonne Rainer. Rainer aimed to reduce dance to its bare essentials, namely its formal qualities, and relieve it of any decorative elements.<sup>236</sup> It is worth repeating her famous manifesto: 'NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.' Obviously Rainer's work demonstrates the importance of the formal elements of the dance and argues for the purity of movement.

Pina Bausch's creations take a completely different turn. She is concerned with blurring the borders between dance, theatre and everyday life and she uses any element at her disposal to achieve that. She questions the very identity of dance. Form does not influence the symbolic space of her dances but some formal elements in her work can still be discerned.

---

<sup>236</sup> See Chapter 1.

As this analysis demonstrates, the abstract idea of pure form influences only selected dance genres. At the same time, one cannot deny that formal elements can be found in every dance. But this fact does not make form a criterion for dance. In the section that follows the views of Levinson and H'Doubler on dance are critically examined, since they were both influenced by the formalist approach to art.

## **6.6. Dance as (Pure) Form**

'Pure movement is a movement that has no other connotations'<sup>237</sup>

The main supporter of the view that dance is pure form is André Levinson, the exiled Russian critic who later pursued a journalistic career in Paris.<sup>238</sup> Levinson argues that dance is neither imitation nor expression. For him these two theories attribute to dance a function outside itself and treat dance as a 'sign'. Dance thus becomes a means to an end; it is not an end in itself. On the contrary, Levinson holds that dance is pure form, free from any outside considerations and meanings. He declares that it is wrong to perceive the dancer's movements as a means of imitation of character or expression of emotion. Bearing this in mind, it comes as a surprise that Levinson was a firm supporter of classical ballet and he hesitated to fall under the spell of the innovations of Duncan and Diaghilev. According to him<sup>239</sup> the majority of dance critics fail to realize that the beauty of dance springs from the movement itself and not

---

<sup>237</sup> Trisha Brown, 'Trisha Brown: An Interview', as published in Huxley and Witts, 1996, p.121. The interesting question, of course, is whether it is possible to have a movement with no connotations.

<sup>238</sup> The information presented here about André Levinson and his theory can be found in Copeland and Cohen 1983, espec. pp. 47-54.

<sup>239</sup> Presented in his essay 'The Spirit of the Classic Dance'.

from any other external element.<sup>240</sup> Levinson, as we saw, found supporters among choreographers interested in abstract/pure dance, which emphasizes form rather than feeling and pattern rather than passion.<sup>241</sup>

A commonsensical objection to that would be that Levinson appears to support the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' which in the case of dance can turn it into a mere routine, with no purpose. However, it seems that Levinson's formalism provides us with a plausible theory which can help us explain works such as Balanchine's (and in general abstract works: works of the so-called 'pure dance' school) yet fails to satisfy those who find in ballet and modern dance elements apart from the pure movements, elements such as theme, meaning, expression of emotion, narrative.<sup>242</sup>

Levinson, after presenting a short history of the art of dance, in which he finds its roots in the art of 'orchesis' of the Greeks, discerns two basic elements in dance: movement and story - abstract form and pure expression. He argues for the superiority of the first. Levinson rejects Aristotle, because in the first chapter of the *Poetics* where he discusses dance, Aristotle declares that its purpose is 'to imitate character, emotion and action, by rhythmical movement'<sup>243</sup>: dance imitates and interprets life. Levinson regretted the long-standing influence of this text. Aristotle assigned to dance an aim outside itself, ascribing to dance a role

---

<sup>240</sup> To quote his exact words: 'It is as though everyone piles upon dance supplementary burdens in his effort to redeem- even if only in a small way - the actual movements of the dance.' Copeland and Cohen, 1983, p.5.

<sup>241</sup> Some of them were influenced and can be associated with the Bauhaus, the school of art and design, founded in Weimar in 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius. He believed that society could be improved through intelligent planning and good design. Many artists were associated with the Bauhaus movement, the most famous being Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky.

<sup>242</sup> Levinson quoted Théophile Gautier whose article appeared in 'La Presse' in 1848: 'The French are not sufficiently artistic to be satisfied with the plastic forms of poetry, painting, music and the dance. They need, in addition, a concrete significance, action, logically worked out story...' Apparently Gautier was a defender of pure ballet. For him the true subject of a ballet is the dance, and dance for him is 'nothing more than the art of displaying elegant and correct designs in positions favourable to the building up of patterns in line... it is essentially materialistic and sensual.' Copeland and Cohen, 1983, pp.47-8.

<sup>243</sup> As previously mentioned Aristotle can be considered as the father of the theory of art as imitation-representation, mainly due to the ideas he expresses in his *Poetics*.

that it should not possess, acting as a substitute for words, and therein lies Levinson's objection to it.

Aristotle's ideas remained influential over the centuries, even reaching Jean-Georges Noverre<sup>244</sup> who characterized dance as an art of imitation aiming to 'copy nature faithfully and to delineate the emotions upon the stage', and Michel Fokine, who celebrated the dramatic ballet against Marius Petipa's great formal ensembles and stylized and abstract endeavours. Levinson claimed that the intrinsic aesthetic value of dance had been sacrificed to the expression of 'ethos' and 'pathos' of Ancient Greek Philosophy. He felt that only in 1830 when Marie Taglioni danced 'The Sylphide', that

the dance instead of being subservient to expressive gesture (as it has been for centuries, if not through its whole history), itself became the interpreter of emotions and their symbolic equivalent... the dancer's routine came to express the highest things of the soul. In a constant approach to geometric purity of design, making a pattern in space of straight lines and sweeping perfect curves, idealizing the dancer's body and dematerialising her costume, the ballet blanc is able to transmute the formal poses of the slow dance movement – The Arabesques of the Adagio - as well as those aerial parabolas outlined by seemingly imponderable bodies into a mysterious and poetic language.<sup>245</sup>

Levinson found supporters for his views in the world of poetry. Apart from the symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé<sup>246</sup> who provided him with a theoretical background for his claims, his ideas about dance were vividly illustrated by another French poet, Paul Valéry, who succeeded

---

<sup>244</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>245</sup> Quoted in Copeland and Cohen, 1983, pp.51-2.

<sup>246</sup> Levinson claims that Mallarmé managed to reveal both the typical material of romantic ballet and the inspiration of his own poetry, which is man's conflict between reality and his dreams, or between the mime and the dancing star.



in presenting 'with incomparable verbal perfection and rare presentation the mixture of flesh and spirit, which is dance.'<sup>247</sup>

It is suggested that Levinson's views were partly realized in what is called 'Absolute Dance'. Many dancers and choreographers, mainly in Europe in the 1920s, discussed this idea, movement. Essentially, what is meant by the term 'absolute dance' is a dance production in which all its elements are basically choreographic, and music, stage design, lighting are secondary elements which contribute to the success of the choreographic effects. Some supporters of modern dance went even further trying to eliminate both choreographic narrative and traditional mimetic gestures. At a theoretical level there does not seem to be a problem with that. But in practice, how can one be sure that in a particular dance piece all the elements are purely choreographic? Even simple music and a minimalistic décor cause some distraction. For such radicals any movement that suggests anything can be labelled as pantomimic and as a consequence should be abolished. However if this were the case, how is a dancer to express anything at all? Elisabeth Selden in *The Dancer's Quest*<sup>248</sup> highlights this problem: 'The question is how close the dancer can get to a purely formal conception without sacrificing the possibility of communication.'<sup>249</sup> And obviously the main aim of the dancers of the 1920s and 1930s was not so much pattern as the attainment of communication with their audiences.<sup>250</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> At this point Levinson refers to *The Soul of the Dance* by Paul Valéry, which is written in the form of a Platonic dialogue between Socrates and his disciples. From this work he quotes the phrase of Socrates 'Do you not realize that the dance is the pure act of metamorphosis?' and he continues, manifesting once again his own views by commenting 'Marvellous words! In dismissing, summarily, this common misapprehension, they go straight to the foundation, to the scheme of the dance and its meaning, which is neither expression nor imitation but pure function. In these imagined words of Socrates, the famous and unhappy paradox of Aristotle seems at last to be reduced to nothing.'

<sup>248</sup> Elisabeth Selden, *The Dancer's Quest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935).

<sup>249</sup> Quotation cited in Anderson, 1997, p.74.

<sup>250</sup> According to Anderson the term 'Absolute Dance' later acquired a broader meaning, and it was applied by critics and dance fans to works they admired. In its everyday use, according to Selden, the term implies dance

It is also worth mentioning that Hanya Holm's<sup>251</sup> works were characterized as 'pure' dances because they explored space and managed to make audiences aware of the countless movement qualities that a dance might consist of. Of contemporary British choreographers, Richard Alston, although his choreography has been varied, can be said to have an enduring interest in pure dance. He has said that he wishes to create 'dances about dancing'.<sup>252</sup>

Another famous dance educationalist Margaret H'Doubler in *Dance – A Creative Art Experience*<sup>253</sup> deals with the issue of form and the pureness of movement, as basic aspects and enduring qualities of dance, in her attempt to establish not only a theoretical framework for thinking and experiencing dance, but also a philosophical attitude/stance towards teaching it as a creative art. 'Form in any art rests upon a deeply rooted principle that is based upon the same biological foundation as human behaviour and activity.'<sup>254</sup> In this case a medium is essential for the manifestation of form and in dance this medium is movement. But this movement cannot exist on its own; it must be closely connected to an imaginative content and a mental discipline. This idea is not innovative; the German expressionist painters and German modern dancers of the same period believed that art could become more powerful when form and content are inseparably joined. This belief was most successfully manifested in the works of Mary Wigman. In *Art Without Boundaries* Jack Anderson quotes Wigman as saying, 'Without ecstasy there is no dance. Without form there is no dance'<sup>255</sup> and comments that 'for Wigman,

---

without music or dance accompanied by instruments – usually percussion - in order to emphasize major choreographic changes or developments in a piece. Selden, 1935, p.74.

<sup>251</sup> German dancer and choreographer of the beginning of the twentieth century, who moved to America.

<sup>252</sup> Angela Kane, 'Richard Alston: Twenty-One Years of Choreography', *Dance Research*, 7(2) (1989), p. 26.

<sup>253</sup> H'Doubler, 1985.

<sup>254</sup> *ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>255</sup> Anderson, 1997, p.60.

form was not merely a container of ecstasy (or for any other passion or idea), but its very embodiment.'<sup>256</sup>

H'Doubler discerns two phases of art form: one the unseen, the inner dance, 'which is the organisation of the mental attributes into content' and the outer, the observed dance, 'which is the result of the organisation and execution of the motor elements'.<sup>257</sup> Form, then, can acquire its fullest meaning as an art form only when a fusion between the inner and the outer dance is achieved. Understandably one can be inclined to conceive form as belonging only to the part of dance that can be seen, namely its movements, and not go deeper to the inner formal organization of dance. In other words, H'Doubler wants to make the general claim that 'Wherever there is life, there is an organic tendency to form'<sup>258</sup> and that constitutes the importance of the formal element in our discussion about dance. In her attempt to elaborate this point she distinguishes three steps in the evolution of dance as an art form. The first step, according to her terminology, is 'elemental and highly sensory. The pleasure is in the movement for the pure joy received from the sensation of moving'.<sup>259</sup> The movements at this stage function as a 'release for physical and emotional energy' and they are spontaneous and rhythmically vigorous. In the second step, we observe an attempt for unity and organization, which aims to achieve some kind of permanency. The mind is now involved in the process and becomes aware of the cause and effect of each movement. Through this process an interest in

---

<sup>256</sup> Martin, 1965, p.230.

<sup>257</sup> 'This observed form is what is usually thought of as dance; and it is only by means of its outwardly constructed form that a dance is able to accomplish its dual purpose of expression and communication. It is through the visible form that the observer is brought into relation with the emotional and intellectual experience of the dances. 'The success of this phase, that can be called structural 'depends upon the choice of movements, their organization, and their execution.' H'Doubler, 1985, p.135.

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>259</sup> The typical movements of this stage are large, unrestrained and unsophisticated. They can be executed with little or no formal preparation and their shape is generated according to the rhythmical functioning of the body rather than by an effort to achieve and ideal form. There is no formal technique involved. The dance is in its infancy. *ibid.*, pp.102-3.



technique and a spirit of inventiveness are introduced. In the third and final stage a refined system of forms gradually evolves. Certain meanings are selected and formulated into movements. 'In this stage the dancer organises movement in order to give his meaning form.'<sup>260</sup>

In this schematic presentation of what one may call the genealogy of dance H'Doubler tried to show that form plays a fundamental role in the art of dance but is not its singular element, as Levinson tried to suggest. H'Doubler here seems to me to agree more with the neoformalist's approach to art which proposes the harmonious fusion of form and content.<sup>261</sup>

It is interesting at this point to quote a (broad) definition of dance used by H'Doubler, which shows that form can be one of the fundamental elements of dance, or even the most important one, but not the only one; in other words dance is not pure form.

We may say...that a dance is the rhythmic motor expression of feeling states, aesthetically valued, whose movement symbols are consciously designed for the pleasure and satisfaction of re-experiencing, of expressing, of communicating, of executing, and of creating form. Such a statement includes the less mature art forms, such as tap, group, and ballroom dancing, as well as the more highly developed forms. All are stimulated by aesthetic experience of some kind of which is expressed in movement. Movement itself is not the essence of motor expression. Dance demands that motor expression grow out of an emotional need. The need may be the desire to enjoy just the sensation of movement; or to re-experience the rhythmical pleasure of the waltz or any other ballroom step; or to tap out in well-organised and well-executed movements an intriguing rhythmical pattern; or to enhance one's pleasure in movement by participation in a group dance.<sup>262</sup>

---

<sup>260</sup> H'Doubler, 1985, pp.104-5.

<sup>261</sup> As a consequence H'Doubler suggests that '... we should be able to go to a dance recital for an aesthetic experience stimulated by movement, and not by music, stage setting, or costumes, except as they supplement and accompany movement. This, of course, is the ideal state, but not an impossible one.' We can then speak about 'Recital dance', which is 'the manifestative dance which approaches absolute dance - dance in its most highly developed form. Its movements depend less upon extraneous aid, such as pictorial or dramatic theme, to convey its message. Movement relies solely upon its own power to arouse emotive forces.' *ibid.*, pp. 123-4.

<sup>262</sup> *ibid.*, pp.128-9.



If we were to agree for a moment that dance is pure form, we should have to accept that every single movement is a dance movement. But this is not true. To the question 'At which point does moving become dancing?' H'Doubler's answer is '... movement becomes dancing when the mind makes sense out of motor sensation by endowing it with personal and artistic meaning. When a complete experience is intentionally given to form in expressive movement, there results a dance.'<sup>263</sup> The key word for dance, according to H'Doubler, is always unity; unity of the individual parts/elements that constitute dance in the sense of wholeness 'so organised that nothing can be added or taken away without damage to the whole.' There can be, of course, variety and contrast between the parts, but balance is the power that holds them together. As a result, 'dance is a definite thing consisting of many parts that are interdependent.'<sup>264</sup>

## 6.7. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we related the notion of form to dance. An explanation was given of the term 'form' by briefly presenting the theories of formalism and neoformalism in art and raising objections to them. Through the analysis of the specific examples of dance genres it was made clear that not all dances are influenced by this notion of form in terms of both their physical and symbolic space, although formal elements can be found in the majority of dances.

---

<sup>263</sup> At this point H'Doubler explains how the desired result can be achieved. She introduces the term 'distortion' of the movement, which is characterized as unfortunate since it implies the ugly and the unnatural. But in the case of dance, and of all arts, the medium / movement is driven to its limits in order for a higher degree of artistic effect and expressive purpose to be achieved. 'If the movement forms executed were only those of ordinary movement experience, there would result not dance but a literal statement of events with no heightened feeling states. However, if movement is twisted and forced into patterns that are too unreal, and from which too much of the human element has been extracted, its communicative value is definitely weakened or lost. And, on the other hand, if movement is too realistic, it tells too much, leaving nothing to the imagination.' H'Doubler, 1985., p. 137.

<sup>264</sup> *ibid.*, p.146.

There is no doubt that form is associated with dance and that almost every dance has formal aspects. The extent to which the abstract idea of form influences the different choreographers and dances varies. However it does not follow from this that the formal aspects are the only elements of dance. We accept that the formal aspects are important for our understanding and appreciation of dance, but they are not the only ones. In other words, we object to the idea that dance is purely formal, not simply formal. Other aspects such as the mimetic and expressive ones, also need to be considered. Dance is a sophisticated human activity which eludes singular definition. On the contrary, a plethora of elements constitute the phenomenon of dance.

Moreover, the notion of form fails to provide us with a helpful tool to distinguish between dance and non-dance movement. An everyday movement can demonstrate formal qualities to the same extent that a dance movement does. It is difficult to say whether it manifests significant form, since we have shown that the term is vague, while it can be claimed that under certain circumstances even non-dance movements manifest significant form. Additionally a particular everyday life movement has always a form appropriate to its content/meaning. Its form reflects its function.

In relation to the second distinction sought, that between dance and gymnastics, the criterion of form cannot help us either. Gymnastics are primarily concerned with formal perfection as is ballet dance, but for completely different reasons. A particular very artistic sequence of gymnastics can easily be confused with a dance movement sequence.

Consequently, in the final chapter we argue for the importance of context to the above distinctions, a point already made. The notion of meaning, as well, which has been briefly

discussed in this and the previous chapters plays a central role in our suggested way of approaching dance. We now turn to approaching dance as a 'form of life'.

## **7. Towards a Philosophy of Dance**

### **7.1. Introduction**

In the first chapter we outlined the framework within which this exploration takes place: we made the distinction between theatre dance and other forms of dance and we provided an explication of the term 'dance' by associating it with the more general term 'art'. We also set out the two key questions that constitute the main axes of the project, and introduced the notions of 'context' and 'tradition' into our discussion. Characteristic examples of the different dance genres were provided as reference points for the discussion.

In the second chapter, we presented a model with the help of which one could unfold what is happening in a dance performance by analyzing the creation of a dance piece. We suggested that what takes place in dance, as in art in general, is a transformation of the symbolic space (intentions, ideas and feelings) of the choreographer to a physical space (movements), and the reverse transformation of this physical space to a symbolic space by the spectator (interpretation and understanding of the dance).

In the chapters that followed we applied the main notions in aesthetics (related to specific aesthetic theories) to dance to explore to what extent these notions successfully characterize the symbolic space of the different dance genres. We also investigated their use as criteria for the distinction between dance and gymnastics on the one hand and dance and everyday movement on the other, as the proponents of each theory seem to suggest they can. But none of these accounts of art proved satisfactory. All failed to establish a way of a distinguishing between dance and other activities.



So, the question remains: What makes a particular movement sequence a piece of dance rather than a piece of gymnastics? It seems that we have difficulty in finding a single criterion that distinguishes dance from non-dance. Similarly we find it impossible to define dance explicitly. But maybe the first task is impossible and the second unnecessary: Dance is not one-dimensional and appears in a variety of forms/genres - consider, for example, the huge differences between classical ballet and modern abstract dance. What is central is to assemble coherently the versatile elements that constitute dance.

After a series of unsatisfactory accounts of the art of dance as viewed from the perspective of a variety of aesthetic theories, we need to find a way out of this frustration and suggest a better way of approaching dance. What we are about to present is a positive suggestion for an approach to dance that accommodates its three distinct aspects, namely the mimetic, expressive and formal aspects. We allow for the possibility that some individual dance paradigms will not fit centrally into our recommended model. Further, our suggested account makes a case for dance as a carrier of a multiplicity of meanings of various contents, viewing dance as a communicational system that is based on the transformation of the symbolic to physical space. We begin by accepting the claim that in the majority of cases the choreographer wants, through the dance performance, to communicate a message (symbolic space of the dance) to the audience using movement as its medium (physical space of the dance). In other words, we argue that dance constitutes a movement-language, a system of communication which should be understood and appreciated as such. In the sections that follow we try to unfold what we mean by such a language and how dance can be perceived as a form of language.

The various theories of art previously discussed tried to find one characteristic of works of art which would serve as the criterion for art – all art. None succeeded. The suggested criteria were not only in opposition to each other but also failed to accommodate the phenomenon of art as a whole. What becomes apparent from these considerations is the inability to suggest a (satisfactory) *definition* of art. But do we need a definition of art in order to understand what art is? An - agreed - definition is not a necessary condition for the meaningful use of a term. It seems that we can correctly use the term 'art', and understand what the term means, without having an agreed definition, or even without a definition at all.<sup>265</sup> One can know or understand things or concepts without necessarily being able to provide such definitions. Nor should we assume that the only way of understanding the meaning of a term is via a definition. It is not necessary for all the objects characterized as art objects to have a common defining characteristic in order for us to be able to understand the meaning of the term 'art'. We are in a position to understand what art means when somebody shows us a painting by Matisse or a sculpture by Degas. In other words, the answer to the question 'what is art?' is simply 'what we call art' or even 'what we understand to be art'. We have argued a similar position for understanding 'dance'. We characterize a movement as dance and not as gymnastics, for example, because of the context in which it takes place, because of our cultural background. This is because the symbolic space of the dance that is being transformed into physical space, namely movement, is completely different from the symbolic space of gymnastics. This is because what we refer to as symbolic space, namely the ideas

---

<sup>265</sup> Wittgenstein does not deny the possibility of a definition, but he disagrees with the claim that the understanding of a term is dependent on that very possibility. More specifically he thinks that art is not a unitary concept, that there is no single essential feature both necessary and sufficient for the classification of an object as a work of art.

and feelings of the creator, is partially constituted by the context in which the activity takes place.

As a consequence it is plausible to argue that the different genres of dance are all characterized and understood as dance because they are related to each other in the way that Wittgenstein describes as 'family resemblances':

...we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of details. I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, feature, colour of the eyes, gait, temperament, etc., etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.<sup>266</sup>

And - anticipating the ending of this section - I shall say 'dances' form such a family.

Approaching the various types of dance in such a way allows for the considerable differences between the genres and accommodates the three main elements of most dances: mimetic, expressive and formal. Moreover, the proposed model of communication - between choreographer, dancer and spectator - can explain the difference of importance that is given to each of the elements in the different dance genres. Furthermore, prior experience of (other) dance performances can also contribute to a recognition of new experimentations in dance. This recognizes a central feature of dance (and art) as a growing and changing activity.

In other words, dance constitutes a Wittgensteinian 'form of life'. Unfortunately, not only does the term occur in very few instances in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein also fails to give a full and satisfactory explication of it. Moreover, although the term has been used by others after Wittgenstein, they have not provided us with the characteristics or elements of

---

<sup>266</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) pp.31-2.

what constitutes a 'form of life'.<sup>267</sup> Apart from that, Wittgenstein's account of form of life in aesthetics is very meagre and as a consequence our use of the term here in relation to dance, or any other art for that matter, is somewhat arbitrary. We argue that dance constitutes a 'form of life', in which the different dances are related to each other in a 'family resemblance' way and that, in order to understand a piece of dance, we need to have some knowledge of the 'movement game' that takes place in front of us. And by knowledge, we do not mean that only dance experts can understand and appreciate dance, or that this knowledge is, or should, or could be, wholly explicit. Experience of other dance performances is often enough to constitute knowledge of the context and tradition of dance. On a more general level, the form of life of dance is related via a family resemblance to other art forms such as music, or painting as well as to the form of life of gymnastics while at the same time being a part of the broader form of life of art. The differences and similarities between dance and other forms of art vary as do the relations between them; the more the similarities the tighter the relation. It seems, for example, that dance is closer to music than to painting. Of course this relation can vary between different genres of each of the arts. All this network of relationships between the different genres and between dance and other activities is shown in Section 7.9.

Finally, it should be noted that although the suggested approach is traditionally Wittgensteinian, we are not interested in adopting a Wittgensteinian approach to aesthetics

---

<sup>267</sup> Arnorld, 2000, when discussing the role of the dancer says that 'the choreographer (the teacher) sees the dancer as an individual person worthy of respect in a form of life in which both are striving for artistic perfection...' (p.90), but he does not give any explanation of what he means by form of life. Again, in Francis Sparshott, 'Some Dimensions of Dance Meaning', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 25(2) (1985): 101-14, the term is used without any explanation: '... if dance is a 'form of life' in the way that sport and religion are...' (Although it should be noted that Sparshott, 1995 provides us with an illustration of the use of the term 'life-form' in regard to religion (see p.193.) The same goes for G.L.Hagberg, who devotes a whole chapter to 'Forms of Life and Artistic Practices' in *Meaning and Interpretation: Wittgenstein, Henry James and Literary Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); he quotes only the sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* in which the term appears.



and its possible difficulties. Much has already been written on this subject.<sup>268</sup> Here we argue simply that the development of such an approach can prove very productive for our understanding and appreciation of dance.

## 7.2. Dance as Language

'A dance does not have to mean something nameable to be meaningful'<sup>269</sup>

Mary Wigman's autobiographical book *The Language of Dance*<sup>270</sup> seminally advocated this idea of dance perceived as a language.

The dance is a living language which speaks of man – an artistic message soaring above the ground reality in order to speak, on a higher level, in images and allegories of man's innermost emotions and need for communication. It might very well be that, above all, the dance asks for direct communication without any detours. Because its bearer and intermediary is man himself, and because his instrument of expression is the human body, whose natural movement forms the material for dance, the only material which is his own and his own to use. This is why the dance and its expression are so exclusively bound to man and his ability to move. Where this ability ceases to be, the dance faces the limitation of its creative and performing possibilities.<sup>271</sup>

The view that dance, and art in general, constitutes a form of language is not of course new. R.G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art* was one of the first aestheticians to claim that

---

<sup>268</sup> We mention here selectively the following well-known articles: Morris Weitz, 'The Role of Theory in Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 15 (1956): 27-35; B.R. Tilghman, 'Wittgenstein, Games and Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 31 (1973): 517-24; R.W. Beardsmore, 'Art and Family Resemblances', *Philosophical Investigations*, 18(3) (1995): 199-215; Refer to Bibliography and References for a fuller list of relevant articles.

<sup>269</sup> Valerie Preston-Dunlop, *Looking at Dances: A Choreographical Perspective on Choreography* (London: Verve Publishing, 1998) p.20.

<sup>270</sup> Wigman, 1966.

<sup>271</sup> *ibid.*, p.10.

all art is a form of language.<sup>272</sup> It has to be admitted though that his view of what constitutes a language is extremely broad. According to Collingwood language is any controlled and expressive bodily activity and any kind of language, including verbal languages, is a specialized form of an original bodily gesture language.<sup>273</sup> Indeed he makes the forthright claim that 'dance is the mother of all languages'.<sup>274</sup> Collingwood not only gives priority to dance/movement language because of its close relation to everyday human activity, but goes even further, arguing that what is expressed in dance cannot be expressed in any other way, providing dance with an unfamiliar autonomy (with which we sympathize).

How then should the term 'language' be understood, so that we can plausibly claim that dance constitutes a language and should be appreciated as such? The notions of communication and (artistic) meaning need to be explored in order to help us clarify this suggestion.

In our approach to language words do not refer to objects as in a simple pictorial theory; rather, the meaning is constituted through an understanding of how the word is used in a

---

<sup>272</sup> Collingwood reached the conclusion that art is a language via the following reasoning 'What kind of thing must art be, if it is to have the two characteristics of being expressive and imaginative? The answer is: Art must be language.' Collingwood, 1938, p.273. And Hagberg in an effort to explain the above view says 'Art, like language, is in its essence both imaginative and expressive. The element shared by language and art – that which can move outward to one or the other – is the object of imagination. The common process that both undergo is the process of expression: from raw to refined experience, impressions to ideas, from patches and undifferentiated emotional charges to imaginary objects. The result is an external representation in the form of an utterance or a work of art.' G.L. Hagberg, *Art as language – Wittgenstein, Meaning and Aesthetic Theory* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1995) p.35.

<sup>273</sup> Collingwood does not admit any priority to verbal language. He says that vocal language is only one among many possible languages or orders of language but he allows that vocal language has an exclusive, or at least pre-eminent, function in the expression of thought.

<sup>274</sup> Collingwood's own words are 'I said that 'the dance is the mother of all languages'; this demands further explanation. I meant that every kind or order of language (speech, gesture, and so forth) was an offshoot from an original language of total bodily gesture. This would have to be a language in which every movement and every stationary pose of every part of the body had the same kind of significance which movements of the vocal organs possess in a spoken language. A person using it would be speaking with every part of himself.' Collingwood, 1938, p.246.

particular context.<sup>275</sup> And in the same way that events are interrelations of objects, sentences are interrelations of words. The words on their own do not picture objects, they just name them. The objects acquire their character only when they are related to other objects and not on their own. Correspondingly, the words are 'colourless' on their own. They acquire their 'colour' - i.e. meaning - when they relate to other words in a sentence; that is to say, in a specific context.<sup>276</sup>

G.L.Hagberg in *Meaning and Interpretation – Wittgenstein, Henry James and Literary Knowledge*<sup>277</sup> gives a very comprehensive account of this idea using Wittgenstein's notion of a game: 'The definition of the word, and the learning of its use, is not prior to the language-game inside which that word functions. And indeed, it may well, and probably will, have multiple functions and uses, but this multiplicity will be determined by the context, the larger game, within which the word operates.'<sup>278</sup> In other words, a word has meaning only as a part of a language-game, which itself is part of a form of life. In the same way, a dance movement has meaning only as part of a movement sequence, which is part of a particular dance.

In the *Philosophical Investigations* (§ 43) Wittgenstein clarifies the notion of meaning by saying that for 'a large number of cases - though not for all - in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: a meaning of a word is its use in the language.' And if we are to claim that art is a form of language, then the meaning of a work of art is similar to the

---

<sup>275</sup> According to Hagberg, 'A familiar Wittgenstein slogan is that a word has meaning only in the context of a sentence.' Hagberg, 1994, p.17.

<sup>276</sup> This provides us with a good explanation of why the same word can have two distinct meanings according to the context in which it is being used. It also explains the way language evolves over time, when the meaning of words change in correlation with their different usages, and more broadly in conformity with the cultural conventions of each period. It can be argued then that language is here understood as structured in terms of a set of cultural conventions.

<sup>277</sup> Hagberg, 1994.

<sup>278</sup> *ibid.*, pp.15-6.

meaning of a word in a sentence, its meaning is its use within the form of life of the world of art.

Consider Sparshott's use of the term 'form of life' (or rather, 'life-form'), in his work on dance:

Religion is an example of a life-form, involving a distinctive set of practices, ways of dressing, facial expressions and bodily comportments, ways of talking, publications and associated literary styles and typefaces, together making up a distinct part of people's lives, a part to which they and those who observe them unhesitatingly refer what pertains to it.<sup>279</sup>

The same can be said in relation to dance. We may differentiate between genres – ballet dance, modern dance, ballroom dance, religious dance – but still, we call all these bodily movements dance. And dance movements are differentiated from other everyday life movements, not because they are in their essence different from the others, but because they are being performed in a specific context, within the framework of what we call 'dance', within the form of life of dance. The dance movements acquire their meaning, their significance, because they are part of a dance. A movement sequence acquires its meaning in terms of the meaning of the whole dance, even in the case of narrative dance pieces.<sup>280</sup>

The meaning of a dance is also influenced by the cultural background in which its creator lives. It may be true that dance is created by an individual but clearly it is also culturally derived. The choreographer gives to her dance the meaning she does, because she is who she is, because she lives where she does, when she does and amongst whom she does. She

---

<sup>279</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.28.

<sup>280</sup> Joanna Friesen, 'Aristotle's Dramatic Theories Applied to Dance Criticism', in Diana Theodores Taplin ed., *New Directions in Dance - Collected Writings From the Seventh Dance in Canada Conference* held at the University of Waterloo, Canada, June 1979, (Oxford: Pergamon Press) claims that 'Much of the language of dance is made up of ornamental or *abstracted* movements. A major difference between the movements dancers perform on stage and those performed in our daily lives is the exaggerated and embellished nature of the dance movements.' (p.19.)



is culturally enmeshed. She is a part of her culture and as a consequence her product will be part of the same culture, or at least, have its origins in that culture.

Sondra Horton Fraleigh agrees:

A coherence of parts establishes context, that which makes meaning possible. Meaning depends on the contextualized whole. *Context is the weaving or joining together of elements to produce a whole.* Its first use concerns written text and how words are understood in relation to one another, but it also applies to movement significance. Neither words nor movement makes meaning when perceived out of context. Rather, we come to understand dance and to define it in terms of context, an inner coherence of movement elements according to purpose. Context is also integral to the setting in which the dance is performed or viewed.<sup>281</sup>

We can argue then that dance is a type of language. But we need to be very cautious about this claim: some critics seem intrigued by the idea of trying to find a parallel between verbal language and so-called dance language, but this constitutes one of the most common confusions, even errors, in dance literature.<sup>282</sup> To say dance is a language should not be taken, as it sometimes is, as claiming that a one-to-one translation into a written language is possible. Dance is not trying to translate word by word a spoken language, it does not work as a type of mimetic language (although it might have some mimetic elements), but as a completely autonomous and independent communicational system with its own structure, which functions in its own framework. That is, dance introduces a different way of viewing the world and the events that occur in it. The elements of this system are facial expressions,

---

<sup>281</sup> From 'Family Resemblance' in Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999b, pp.8-9.

<sup>282</sup> Ann Hutchinson-Guest for instance, thinks that dance is like verbal language in that it possesses equivalents to the grammatical categories of nouns, verbs and adverbs. 'Movement means change and to produce change an action of some sort must occur. In the grammar of movement, these actions are verbs. The parts of the body that move are the nouns. How the action is done, the degree of change or the manner of performance is described by adverbs.' Quotation from Hutchinson-Guest's *Labanotation* (1970), reprinted in Jacob Zelinger, 'Semiotics and Theatre Dance', in Taplin, 1979. Paul Ziff, 'About the Appreciation of Dance', in Fancher and Myers, 1981, argues against the view that dance can be seen as a language, taking the term language in its narrow sense, trying to find syntactic and semantic structures in dance that should qualify dance as a language. He suggests that dance movements have expressive value instead of linguistic meaning. The problem with his approach is that he falls into the trap of trying to associate configurations of movements with straightforward propositional meanings of statements.

movements of hands and arms, shifting of the body; all these reveal to us the quality of experience and feelings of the moving person and not the exact words that would describe the same situation. Dance should be understood and appreciated in a context of its own. As a consequence, a spectator of a dance performance needs to interpret the context in order to identify the message; needs to be able to transform the physical space of the dance into a symbolic space, reversing the creative procedure of the choreographer.

We should not, of course, expect each and every one of the spectators to de-code the message of the dance in the same way. As in any case of aesthetic judgments, the factor of subjectivity and the different personal experiences of individuals can influence the understanding of a work of art.

### **7.3. The Question of Artistic Meaning: Does Artistic Meaning lie beyond the Sayable?**

‘The further away dance goes from realism, the purer it becomes, and the less obvious is its meaning. If movement is not pantomimic and does not tell a story, the dance is saying something that has to be danced and cannot be said in any other way.’<sup>283</sup>

The philosophical literature on meaning is immense. In this section we shall only discuss whether artistic meaning is different from linguistic meaning, whether this constitutes a problem for our approach to dance, and more importantly, whether dance as a form of art, does try to communicate a meaning.

It has been argued that language functions to communicate cognitive meaning and art functions to communicate emotive meaning.<sup>284</sup> In other words, art is the language of the

---

<sup>283</sup> Judith Jaffe Snyder, ‘The Expressive Meaning of a Dance’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 12 (1954): 518-21.

emotions and feelings of the artist. This view reduces art to an expression of feelings and emotions.<sup>285</sup> While this cannot be denied entirely, as we have seen in previous chapters it fails to tell the whole story about art. Examples of works of art that intend to communicate ideas and not feelings are numerous. It might be true that the meanings which art works carry are more emotionally charged than the meanings that our everyday language communicates but this is not an argument for the view that art has only emotive meaning. At the same time we seem unwilling to give up altogether the view that art possesses some sort of meaning (emotive or not), which, of course, would be a solution to our problem. However, when asked something about the precise meaning of an artwork we usually have difficulty expressing it in words.

In the case of dance, we have argued that one should be able to transform the physical space of the dance into symbolic space in order to understand the ideas and feeling of the choreographer: the message that the choreographer wants to communicate, an activity that constitutes the interpretation of a particular dance. The meaning of a dance might be emotive but it is not purely emotive.

Bearing these considerations in mind, another view was put forward, most notably by Susanne Langer, that meaning in art lies beyond the sayable; in other words, that art expresses what cannot be expressed in words.<sup>286</sup> She suggests the idea that artistic activity is a symbolic activity and, in the case of dance, each gesture can carry a meaning, can be a symbol of meaning. Moreover, these symbols do not mirror the external world but symbolize

---

<sup>284</sup> G.L.Hagberg expresses this view: 'Artistic expression is widely held to be a material embodiment of a prior inner emotional state, and to be the direct artistic analogue to linguistic meaning.' Hagberg, 1995, pp. 4-5.

<sup>285</sup> John Martin holds on similar view: 'We have lost all awareness of the fact that movement can be and is a means of communication, of the objectification of inner feeling – in short, of art expression.' Martin, 1975, pp.14-5.

<sup>286</sup> Langer was influenced by the Picture Theory of Meaning developed in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* as is obvious in her *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957).

the choreographer's inner world, 'they mirror inner objects of the private world of feeling'<sup>287</sup> that cannot be expressed in words. It might be true that some things are better understood when shown rather than said, but this does not automatically mean that art expresses something that cannot be expressed in words.

This whole intellectual construction of gestures symbolizing feelings seems at least implausible. How can gestures/movements have in every dance the same meaning? And who is to determine which gesture stands for which feeling? It might be the case for classical ballet that some specific movements imply certain notions - for example high leaps performed by male dancers in most classical ballets are expressive of masculine strength, power or dominance and seek to create an awed reaction in the audience - but there is not a unique set vocabulary of symbols as Langer appears to imply. Certain movements/gestures acquire a completely different meaning when performed in different contexts. A movement does not carry a meaning in isolation but only in relation with other movements within the framework of a dance. Hence dance functions as a language in later Wittgensteinian terms, not as a reference to 'inner states'. Furthermore art, and in particular dance, does not express something that cannot be said in words (though it might be better, or more fully, said in movement), but it is a matter of choice/ preference of the artist in which medium she will decide to create. The choreographer chooses the medium of movement to express her ideas and feelings.

We may wonder when attending a dance performance, how we are to know what meaning the choreographer intends a movement to convey. We can speculate about the meaning of a certain movement, taking into consideration the movement which preceded it or the movement which followed, the setting of the performance, and a whole variety of matters

---

<sup>287</sup> Hagberg, 1995, p.14.



related to the dance in order to try to understand the meaning of a particular movement. But even if we do examine all these elements, we might fail in our interpretation; we might give a completely different meaning to the movement from that which the choreographer had intended. But maybe we are missing the point. What extra do we have to gain by grasping the precise meaning of a particular movement? And who judges whether our interpretation is right or wrong? It may be that our interpretation never occurred to the choreographer when she chose the particular movement. That is the fascination of artworks and the magic of dance in particular: they are open to different interpretations.<sup>288</sup> Of course, some knowledge of the 'codes' of dance language greatly eases this problem.

A distinction can be drawn between conveying a meaning and being meaningful, as Sparshott has indicated. 'All sorts of facial expressions, movements of hands and arms, even shifting of the body are meaningful; they reveal to us the quality of experience and will of the moving person, without our being able to say in words what it is that is conveyed. But there are also gestures, especially of the hands, that convey meanings that have verbal equivalents.'<sup>289</sup> These latter are the mimetic elements of a dance that can be 'translated' into verbal language.

For it is not singular movements that establish meaning. Meaning arises within the entire context of the movement and its perceived purpose. No single movement in a dance means anything by itself. A jump is just a jump until it is contextualized within a community of dance makers, performers, and audience-participants. The aesthetic properties of a dance (its qualitative values), its aesthetic essence (its subject), its symbolic and metamorphic powers are created and interpreted within a cultural context. The dance *meaning* (I believe we can use this word when speaking of nonverbal phenomena) is established through interpretation and communication, engaging our thinking through the body.<sup>290</sup>

---

<sup>288</sup> Sondra Horton Fraleigh claims 'several different interpretations of the same dance event are possible. It is through such varied perspectives that we share the dance event.' Fraleigh, 1999a, p.191.

<sup>289</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.247.

<sup>290</sup> Fraleigh, 1999a, p.196.

We have argued so far that dance can be regarded as a type of language in the sense that it communicates a message from the choreographer/dancers to the audience via movement. This does not mean that dance can be used as a substitute for a verbal language. This further emphasizes that any attempt at a 'translation' fails. The movements which are the 'words' of this dance language acquire their meaning by being performed in the specific context of the form of life of a dance. They are thus differentiated from other everyday life movements, which might be similar in appearance but different in significance.

We also argued that artistic meaning, and consequently dance meaning, is not purely emotive. It can also communicate cognitive meaning through the transformation of the symbolic into physical space. In the sections that follow we further explore the medium of this transformation, namely movement.

#### **7.4. The Medium of Movement**

*Every little movement has a meaning all its own,  
Every thought and feeling by some posture may be shown.<sup>291</sup>*

Dance cannot be disassociated from everyday human movement, simply because dance is made up of movement. Dance cannot exist without human movement. This is not a revelation: bodily movement is the basic material of dance. We are in a position to relate to the movements of the dancers, because we have awareness of our own bodily movement. One of the ways in which we understand dance movement is with the help of the background knowledge that our everyday movements provide. Mary Wigman characteristically claims:

---

<sup>291</sup> From Otto Harbach's musical comedy hit of 1910, *Madam Sherry*. Quoted in Anderson, 1997.

Certainly, bodily movement alone is not yet dance. But it is the element and incontestable basis without which there would be no dance. When the emotion of the dancing man frees the impulse to make visible yet invisible images, then it is through bodily movement that these images manifest themselves in their first stages, and it is movement through which the projected dance gesture receives the living breath of its rhythmically pulsating power.<sup>292</sup>

Sondra Horton Fraleigh holds a similar view.

'Dance derives from human movement and consciousness. It is an activity that ensues from our nature as moving beings and speaks of that nature and its environment and culture. I believe that movement is part of our nature which does not mean that we have no choices to make about what movement, where, and when.'<sup>293</sup>

Dance is not just any movement, but movement created for a particular purpose. It might be the case that many other movement activities are constructed and perceived aesthetically, but dance is movement that is distinct due to its innate artistic character. So Jacob Zelinger is right to claim that 'the dance is human movement in its aesthetic function' and to argue later that 'a dance is therefore 'read' against the background of the prevailing artistic tradition and that of everyday movement' since it requires a degree of knowledge of the 'codes' of the dance system as well as knowledge of the 'codes' of everyday movement in order to be in a position to understand dance.<sup>294</sup> A suggestion that of course brings us back to the idea that dance functions as a form of language. For someone to be able to read a linguistic message there are two requirements: knowledge of the literal code and knowledge of the language in which the message is written. Similarly, for someone to be able to understand a dance/movement message, the requirements are a degree of knowledge of dance language and a more general acquaintance with the form of life of dance.

---

<sup>292</sup> Wigman, 1966, p.10.

<sup>293</sup> Fraleigh, 1999a. pp.192-3

<sup>294</sup> Zelinger, 1979.

It should be mentioned here, what is more or less obvious, that classical ballet, being more structured and constrained, is easier to be mastered in terms of the knowledge of the codes since the relationship between the signifier and the signified is less variable, than with modern dance. In classical ballet there is 'a set of rules that are rigid, that have developed over a long period, in the sense that languages have developed, and consequently a complex technique that must be mastered.'<sup>295</sup>

We return to the issue of distinguishing between dance movements and everyday-life movements. What makes a particular sequence of movements dance and not gymnastics? The answer, unsurprisingly, is: context. Dance constitutes a 'form of life' with its own rules/ 'codes' and the individual movements, gestures and body shifting make sense only within its framework. This is how dance functions as a language that incorporates mimetic, expressive and formal elements in order to communicate a different message each time. The meaning of each movement may be differentiated by what is referred to, by what is expressed or by how it relates to other movements – in other words by forming part of movement systems.

Movement gives meaning and significance to the artistically shaped and formed gesture-language. For the dance becomes understandable only when it respects and presents its meaning relative to the natural movement-language of man. Beyond the personal interpretation underlying the dancer's gesture, there is always the responsibility and obligation to make clear the universal super-personal meaning – which the dancer can neither change forcibly nor exchange arbitrarily without endangering the general validity of his message.<sup>296</sup>

The dance language can only be understood within the form of life of dance, which is constituted by the choreographer, the dancers and the audience, lighting, costumes and music, as well as by the symbolic space of the dance, the particular ideas and feelings that the

---

<sup>295</sup> Haskell, 1962, p.55.

<sup>296</sup> Wigman, 1966, p.10.



choreographer wants to communicate. By these aspects being introduced in this form of life we shall be able to understand the various movement-games that take place in it as well as realize how the different genres are parts of the same form of life and not of a different one, such as gymnastics. The form of life of gymnastics is both similar to and distinct from that of dance. The meaning of a dance performance and of a gymnastics demonstration is completely different. And this difference stems mainly from the different intentions and symbolic spaces of each of the activities. The choreographer of a dance piece wants to communicate a message, while this is not true for a piece of gymnastics. The symbolic space of the latter is governed by the aspiration to manifest accuracy, perfection and in some cases, provide aesthetic pleasure in the beauty and harmony of the movements, since the activity takes place in a competitive context. All these ideas can be part of the symbolic space of dance as well, but they do not constitute its main elements while the element of competition is in most cases removed.<sup>297</sup>

## 7.5. Dance Notation

In an endeavour to understand dance, and more precisely, individual dance works, there have been various attempts to analyze movement and record it. In Chapter 2 we attempted a brief analysis of some of the most common movements in dance in order to help our understanding of dance. A central issue in understanding movement in dance is that of the notation of dance - a major issue in the dance world. The work of Rudolf Laban, the notorious *Labanotation*, dominates the area. Although the actual notational systems do not concern us here, we want to underline the fact that such attempts support our view that dance is a type of

---

<sup>297</sup> There are of course dance competitions and auditions, but these are exceptions to the normal context in which dance takes place. Admittedly they are the closest that dance can be in relation to gymnastics.

language. The idea, though, that movement sequences should be notated in linguistic symbols contradicts our view on dance, but certainly shows that a structure, similar to the linguistic one, can be found in dance. Ann Hutchinson-Guest supports this view:

... The term 'Language of Dance' has come to mean a deep understanding of movement through analysis of its basic content illuminated and reinforced by the use of the Laban system of movement notation. Movement has its own logic. The natural language of dance stems from the movement itself, that is, from the physical 'syntax', the intent of the movement and the form that intention takes.<sup>298</sup>

Adrienne Kaeppler's work is worth mentioning here. In an analysis of Tongan dance she used the terms *kinemes* and *morphokines* as the movement equivalent of the linguistic terms *phonemes* and *morphemes*, and tried to find out what Tongans considered significant units of movement, going on to create a multi-layered system of analysis. The *kinemes* stand for significant movements, while the *morphokines* correlate to meaningful movement units made up of certain *kinemes*.<sup>299</sup> Consideration of whether this is an efficient, even a successful, system of movement analysis, is not within the scope of this thesis, but certainly Kaeppler's work and similar attempts demonstrate that dance is a structured system of meaning.

We now turn to our suggested analytical model according to which the elements of the form of life of dance can be classified. This can contribute to a better understanding of the family resemblance relations between the different dance genres and can provide us with indications of the elements that differentiate dance from gymnastics.

---

<sup>298</sup> Hutchinson-Guest, 1984, pp.103-4.

<sup>299</sup> More information about the Kaeppler system of movement analysis can be found in her article 'Method and Theory in Analysing Dance Structure with an Analysis of Tongan Dance', *Ethnomusicology* 16 (1972): 173-215.

## 7.6. Analysis of Classification

In order to discuss productively the form(s) of life which might characterize dance we shall, as we have argued, need to investigate language games. Language games are governed by the relations between the concepts captured by the language. We shall therefore need to decide how we may elucidate these concepts. Wittgenstein's suggestion of the concepts having a family resemblance structure can be regarded as a starting point.

The detailed structure of family resemblance concepts has been discussed in the literature and has been shown to be a part of a more general investigation of systematic taxonomy. To understand what would be involved in analyzing the concept of dance in this way we need to look at the more general characteristics of classification systems, particularly the categorical judgments which must be made to set up a successful and useful classification. It is only then that we can confidently decide the way in which the dance genres cohere under the general concept of dance, and also the way in which dance differs from gymnastics on the one hand, and other art forms on the other.

The fundamental building block of classificatory systems is a measure of similarity between the elements that are to be classified. But, as in any classification problem, this similarity cannot be directly comprehended without begging the questions that we wish to resolve. We must therefore look to the sub-elements involved in the classification to construct the measure of similarity. We must look to the similarity, or otherwise, between these sub-elements.

In the literature there are two distinct ways in which this can be done.<sup>300</sup> The first procedure is to measure similarity in terms of the relative number of elements that the objects we want to classify have in common. This measure is appropriate when the sub-elements do not lend themselves to metrical scales of measurement so that we cannot meaningfully talk of degrees of similarity between the sub-elements of the concept. For example, in contrasting the sub-elements in an analysis of different dance genres, we might consider the role of music. The contrast between traditional ballet and modern abstract dance involves the sub-element of musical accompaniment. But although these genres use music to differing degrees there is no obvious and uncontroversial way of putting a non-arbitrary, significant measure on the degree of its use. Therefore, in cases like this, we provide a list of possible elements in common and decide, for any two genres, what proportion the two actually have in common.

The second procedure, where the elements do lend themselves to metrication, for example in botanical taxonomy where the elements are physical characteristics, finds no application in our analysis of dance. This view is re-enforced in Jardine and Sibson's investigation of the various definitions of similarity. They differentiate three measures:

1. A-similarity (Association): This kind of similarity can be applied to both individuals and classes of individuals. This similarity stems from the shared attribute states, 'and increases as the number or the proportion of shared attribute state increases.'
2. I-distinguishability: refers to the extent to which classes of individuals can be distinguished. 'It may be thought of in terms of the probability, of correct reassignment of an individual from one of the classes on a basis of information.'

---

<sup>300</sup> Nicholas Jardine and Robin Sibson, *Mathematical Taxonomy*, Willey Series in Probability and Mathematical Statistics (London: John Willey & Sons, 1971).



3. D-dissimilarity: is a more subtle concept. 'If x is a class of individuals known to be one of A, B, then its identification as A or as B gives information about the character states which describe it, further to the information given by knowing that simply x is one of A, B, but not which one.' The information we can gain in this way is not well defined.<sup>301</sup>

They conclude that only the A-similarity measures are suitable for classification of individuals, since in this case we do not have to deal with the difficulties that arise by variability and correlation in classes of individuals. This is exactly the measure we have proposed above.<sup>302</sup>

We have always to bear in mind that the construction of any system of classification is to a certain degree arbitrary, in terms of the choice of the attributes which will be included in the system and their calculation, 'except in those cases where the particular classificatory problem imposes sufficient special constraints to indicate how this should be done.'<sup>303</sup> The situation is even more complex when we are trying to construct a classificatory system for classes of individuals, because of the problems raised by the variability and correlation of attributes within the classes. 'In order that a measure of dissimilarity with respect to many attributes be suitable for taxonomic purposes, we require that it allow for classes which are already completely discriminated by some attribute to vary in the extent to which they are dissimilar.'<sup>304</sup> It is

---

<sup>301</sup> Jardine and Sibson, 1971, p.4-5.

<sup>302</sup> *ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>303</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>304</sup> Jardine and Sibson, 1971, p.8

obvious, from the above brief analysis, that similarities are constructed rather than discovered, since similarity is not a property of a thing, but a relation within a taxonomic structure.<sup>305</sup>

So, in working towards the construction of our classificatory system we need first to answer the question that refers to the degree of the commonality of elements. But how similar do the different dance genres have to be in order to be classified under dance? To answer this we create first a matrix of similarities between the different dance genres and gymnastics and music. Then we count the number of attributes that they have in common. At this point, we need to decide on a significance level, a significant proportion of the available elements which entails a threshold level under which a particular dance piece fails to be characterized as dance and should be put in another category. Our constraints are two: We do not want our system to be too sensitive to new genres that might be added in the future, we aim for stability. And secondly, we do not want our system to be too inclusive, because then modern abstract dance would automatically be classified together with gymnastics. As a consequence we need to be very careful with the elements/thresholds that we decide to include.<sup>306</sup> This is a matter for experimentation and debate.

We also need to mention here a distinction between groups: there are groups that are formed around one member and all the consecutive relations derive from an original non-transitive relation. This group then is fundamentally a circle which is formed around the first member. The second are groups that are formed by classes of individuals which are put

---

<sup>305</sup> As argued by Nelson Goodman in 'Seven Strictures on Similarity', in Mary Douglas and David Hull eds., *How Classification Works – Nelson Goodman among the Social Sciences* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) pp.13-23.

<sup>306</sup> Ruth Katz, 'History as 'Compliance': The Development of Western Musical Notation in the Light of Goodman's Requirements', in Douglas and Hull, 1992, pp.99-128, shows that in the case of music the scoring technique has evolved by gradually shedding non-musical information. This involves decisions about the nature of the strictly musical in the flow of events that is a song or a melody.

together because of their similarities.<sup>307</sup> We are interested in the latter because in the classification of dance and its developing genres we need the system of classification to track the historical development of our subject.

We can now use this analysis in a general clustering procedure. We first set the proportion of elements in common which will determine whether the genres are, *prima facie*, part of the same cluster. This is the significance level discussed above. We then look to see whether the clustering includes similar dances and excludes gymnastics. If not, we then set the average level of similarity to achieve this. This may sound circular. But there are important constraints in the process. We need the classification to be stable when new genres are added, and we do not want the classification to change radically if the threshold levels are changed by a small degree. If this did happen we would not be confident that we had established a robust and useful classification. Indeed, like most classifications that are derived from factual data, the classification's usefulness in describing the phenomena and gaining the confidence of investigators cannot be predicted in advance. This is an advantage for us since we are analyzing dance with a view to providing the conceptual tools for further analysis.

## 7.7. Dance versus Gymnastics

We turn now to an illustration of the above analysis, considering what we have already argued in terms of the different contexts in which dance and gymnastics take place and in the knowledge of the traditions that can help us distinguish between the two.<sup>308</sup> We have also

---

<sup>307</sup> For a further discussion of this see Douglas Gasking, 'Clusters', *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 38(1) (1960): 1-36.

<sup>308</sup> When we say dance we refer only to theatre dance, as it was explained and characterized in Chapter 1.

suggested that the Wittgensteinian term 'form of life' can better characterize these two activities by including their various elements.

Bearing all these in mind, what we are trying to do here is twofold: firstly, to classify the elements of the two forms of life in terms of their significance, and secondly to find their similarities. In other words, we provide here a description of the application of the foregoing analysis of dance and gymnastics without going into the technical details of attributing percentages/degrees to the various elements. In a further analysis of the form of life of dance we are trying to find those elements that make different dance genres similar to such a degree as to characterize each of them as dance and group them together, and at the same time render them dissimilar from gymnastics.

We have argued in a previous chapter<sup>309</sup> that choreography is the creative activity during which the symbolic space (ideas, feelings and intentions of the choreographer) is transformed into physical space (movements). Bearing that in mind, we have also suggested that the dancers are the main medium of this transformation and that the spectators make the reverse transformation of physical into symbolic space (understanding and appreciation of the dance). As a consequence dance, we argue, communicates a message, is a system of communication. The communication of a message is considered to be the most important element in the form of life of dance and constitutes the main criterion for the differentiation between dance and gymnastics. Even if one argues that gymnastics does communicate a message, this does not constitute the primary aim of the activity, while it is central for dance, even if what is being communicated is the movement itself (the abilities of the human body) as in modern abstract dance.

---

<sup>309</sup> Chapter 2.



Movement is the second most important element of the form of life of dance. But this element is also equally important to gymnastics. The difference here can be found in relation to the execution of movement. For gymnastics the accuracy and perfection of the execution is perhaps the most important element while this is not the case for dance. Of course the dancers, especially ballet dancers, need to execute the movements accurately in order to achieve the best result, but this is not as high in the hierarchy of dance. The element of competition is very high in the classification of gymnastics, while it is not for dance.

Important elements of the form of life of dance are the costumes, the lighting, and the scenery. They constitute indications that what takes place in front of us is a dance performance and not a gymnastics display. Lighting and scenery are absent in the case of gymnastics and the costumes are of less importance. They might contribute to the symbolic space but not to the degree that they do in dance. The costumes in dance carry a message of their own.

The same can be said about music. As we have already argued the symbolic space of the dance is influenced to a great extent by the symbolic space of the music. This is also partly true for gymnastics. But the role of the music is secondary in a gymnastics performance.

There is also the element of criticism that is present in both forms of life, but is more important in the case of gymnastics due to the competitive element which is so significant.

High in the hierarchy of both forms of life are the choreographers, the dancers/athletes and the audience, but these elements are common to both. We could argue though that the role of the athletes is more important than that of the choreographer in gymnastics while in dance it is the other way around (except in the case of improvisation) and as well, that the role

of the audience in the dance is more vital than in gymnastics, bearing in mind the importance that we place on the element of the communication of a message.

In summary, the characteristic elements of the form of life of dance that distinguish it from the form of life of gymnastics are: the communication of a message, the role of the audience, the role of music and lighting, costumes and scenery. The characteristic elements of gymnastics are that of competition, the accuracy of execution, the importance of the athlete in relation to the choreographer.

We move now to the second task: Why we say that the different dance genres fall under the form of life of (theatre) dance. All the above sub-elements are common to a greater or lesser degree to all dance genres. We have already mentioned the role of the notion of tradition<sup>310</sup> and have argued earlier in this chapter that one can reach a satisfactory knowledge of the codes only with the 'knowledge' that one can acquire from the experience of different dance performances. This indicates that there is an historic continuity that is traceable among the genres. This can also be noted in a particular movement as well: one can note for example how some typical ballet movements are still being used in modern productions or having evolved (mainly towards simplification and abstraction) are now being used in modern dances. So the similarity of movements is one of the indicative elements that different genres fall into the same category.

Although the messages that are being communicated via movement constantly change, the process itself stays the same. As a consequence, we argue that the model of communication that we suggested which takes place in the creative and interpretative process of a dance is common to all (theatre) dances.

---

<sup>310</sup> Chapter 1.

The element of accurate execution, despite the fact that it is not high in priority, can also be considered as a common characteristic of all dances.

Finally, the importance of the contribution of the secondary elements does vary. In classical ballet for example their role is vital for the communication of the narrative to the audience while their absence or minimal presence in modern dance underlines the purity of movement (form) that abstract dance wants to communicate.

Consequently, in the case of dance genres, we can talk about similarity 'by virtue of shared attribute states' that can vary in degree. Of course some attributes are shared by some and not all of the genres, but the family resemblance way in which they connect with each other creates a network of relationships/similarities between the genres.

In the same 'family resemblance' way of course, we need to acknowledge that some modern dances are perhaps closer to gymnastics than we might like to admit. In this case, the difference in the other elements would make the distinction possible.

## **7.8. Modern Dance Versus Classical Ballet**

Following the above analysis we can compare two genres that are located at the two extremes of the dance tradition: classical ballet and modern abstract dance. It goes without saying that they share all the elements that we mentioned earlier and they are part of the dance cluster. The degree of some of the elements varies, and there the differences can be found. Differences, however, that are not so great as to force us to either change the threshold levels or to exclude one of the two from the cluster.

More specifically the elements of movement and communication are equally significant for both, though the quality of the significance of course differs. This can be understood in relation to the different symbolic space of each genre. In ballet, the movement is used as a medium to communicate mainly the narrative, when in modern dance, where there is no story to be told, the movement is used as the medium to communicate the pureness of the form. The role of the choreographer is equally important. The only deviation is that in modern dance the technique of improvisation might be used, and as a consequence the dancer might undertake some aspects of the role of the choreographer. The role of the audience is similar to both cases. The possible knowledge of what is going on in a classical ballet might influence its understanding, but this is related to the external factor of previous experience and knowledge, which we discuss later in this section. The element of the accuracy of execution is common to both, apart from cases where the dancers are deliberately asked to execute the movements in a more casual way. The element of music is also common and of equal significance. We have already argued that a well-known score can and will influence the symbolic space of a dance.<sup>311</sup> The secondary elements of costumes, lighting and scenery might not be as prominent in modern dance as they are in ballet. But even in the case of extreme minimalism, their absence is underlined and contributes to the communication of the message. Finally, the elements of criticism and competition are of minor importance to both. The latter might even be excluded from the cluster.

From the above brief comparison, we can see that there are variations and differences between the genres, as was made obvious from the analysis in the previous chapters of the relation between the abstracted aesthetic notions and the various dance genres. It is important

---

<sup>311</sup> For example Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.



though for the stability and usefulness of our model that these variations fail to destroy the cluster 'dance' and that introduction of a new genre could also be incorporated.

To go back to the factor of understanding and interpretation of the different dances by the audience, a difference can be noted at this point. As has already been mentioned the notion of language can be more directly related to classical ballet, due to its stricter structure, than to modern dance. John Martin said of ballet: 'The classic dance has a set vocabulary of movement which for perfection of execution must be performed in a prescribed manner.'<sup>312</sup> But this does not mean that modern dance does not have a language of its own. Some dances communicate directly, and in those each movement stands for something quite specific; these dances fall into the category of ballet dance. Some other dances communicate nothing more than themselves, they are abstract dances but they still communicate something; these are characterized as modern dance. If we are to allow that in both circumstances choreographers want to communicate their ideas through dance, then it must be true that 'a dance performance does not communicate directly but contains layers of meaningful elements created by the various participants in the event including the spectator.'<sup>313</sup> The above description of the process of how messages are communicated through dance matches our view on the matter. The choreographer has something to say, to share. Her chosen medium is dance movement, movement performed by dancers in a specific time and space into which her ideas are put, to form a dance message.<sup>314</sup> This message is performed by dancers and received by spectators. The dance, in other words is interpreted by the spectators through the

---

<sup>312</sup> Martin, 1965, p.14.

<sup>313</sup> Preston-Dunlop, 1998, p. 7.

<sup>314</sup> There is no general reason to choose dance to communicate certain ideas and feelings apart from the general remark that movement is something familiar to us and very close to our everyday experience of our body. So it could be argued that the communication of ideas that are related to body-related issues and our living in the world would be more vividly and more directly communicated via movement due to our familiarity with our bodies and their capacities.

transformation of the physical space (performed movements) to symbolic space. This is what we call understanding of dance. The fact that my understanding might be different from yours does not constitute an objection to the feasibility of our suggested process. Even in verbal language, a message is not understood by everyone in the same way. Different degrees of knowledge of the language and different personal experiences do influence our understanding of the same phrase.

In the case of ballet, the communication of the dance message is easier, since there is a narrative, which is usually known to the audience, and a set of 'codes' that are more straightforwardly grasped since they are repeatedly used in a similar way in each ballet. There is a living tradition. So a spectator with a reasonably wide experience of ballet performances is in a position to understand the ballet language, since the symbolic space of ballet tends to be more limited than that of modern dance.

The situation becomes slightly more complicated in the case of modern dance, since it is more abstract, lacks narrative and there are a greater variety of 'codes' which differ from one choreographer to another. It is also true with modern dance that the language keeps evolving. It can incorporate elements from other forms of art, such as painting, poetry, video art. There is a tradition in this case as well but it is a more versatile one. The messages that are being communicated are also more complicated. As a consequence the decoding of the dance message might be more difficult, but, one feels, more challenging. The 'network of family resemblances' in the case of modern abstract dance is more complex. There are always, of course, the border-line cases that can aim to destroy these 'family resemblance' relations, but this does not mean that for the majority of cases there are not such relations.

Our account of dance as a 'form of life' bears one more advantage; it takes into consideration the varying circumstances, the different cultural backgrounds that influence the dance of each historical period, and allows for the evolution of the art of dance, making a case for the dance of the future. As Hagberg says, 'In aesthetics, we would ask 'What is art', 'What is artistic meaning' as though one could be provided not only in isolation from the artistic practices and contexts within which aesthetic gestures are significant but in isolation from, and prior to, any future experience of new artistic developments.'<sup>315</sup>

## 7.9. Application and Validation

We now turn to the application of the methods described in the Analysis section. The process is done in three stages. In Table 1 we set out a two-dimensional array. The rows are the putative elements of the family resemblance: the different dance genre and the associated activities of gymnastics (G), ice-skating (IS)<sup>316</sup>, painting (P) and sculpture (SC).<sup>317</sup> The columns are the elements of the forms of life of dance and gymnastics as well as the abstracted notions that the aesthetic theories discussed in Chapters 3-6 suggest as criteria for art and which we argued can be for elements of some dance genres as well. We indicate with √ the elements that can be found in each of the dance genres and the four other categories and with X the

---

<sup>315</sup> Hagberg, 1994, p.54.

<sup>316</sup> There is also the case of ice-dance which is actually dance on ice (e.g. 'Sleeping Beauty on Ice'), but we chose ice-skating because we wanted a genre that is related to gymnastics rather than dance, in order to show the relation between the two. It goes without saying that the case of ice-dance is closer to dance.

<sup>317</sup> Abbreviations: D1: Romantic Ballet, D2: Classical Ballet, D3: Neoclassical Ballet, D4: Isadora Duncan, D5: Rudolf Laban, D6: Mary Wigman, D7: Martha Graham, D8: Merce Cunningham, D9: Yvonne Rainer, D10: Pina Bausch, G: Gymnastics, IS: Ice -Skating, P: Painting, SC: Sculpture, M: Mimesis, B: Beauty/Grace, E: Expression, F: Form, Nr: Narrative/Story, Mv: Movement, Cm: Communication, Ch: Choreographer/Artist, D: Dancers, A: Audience, Ac: Accuracy of Execution, Ms: Music, CLS: Costumes, Lighting, Scenery, Cr: Critique, Cp: Competition.

elements that they do not possess or in very low proportion. It is worth recalling that we are involved in a process of explication (see Chapter 1) where the demands of fidelity to our intuitive notions must be balanced by the simplicity and fecundity of the derived concept. We are, in the spirit of Wittgenstein, attempting a synthetic analysis which must answer to usage. Accordingly we set a threshold for the boundary between the assignment of a tick and that of a cross. The process is iterative in that we are seeking to set this and thresholds discussed later so as to produce a classification that is useful, informative and stable under minor changes of threshold levels. That is, the classification does not change wildly under small changes of threshold choice.



	<b>M</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Nr</b>	<b>Mv</b>	<b>Cm</b>	<b>Ch</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>Ac</b>	<b>Ms</b>	<b>CLS</b>	<b>Cr</b>	<b>Cp</b>
<b>D<sub>1</sub></b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X
<b>D<sub>2</sub></b>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X
<b>D<sub>3</sub></b>	X	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X
<b>D<sub>4</sub></b>	X	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	√	X
<b>D<sub>5</sub></b>	X	X	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	X	√	X
<b>D<sub>6</sub></b>	X	X	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	√	X
<b>D<sub>7</sub></b>	X	X	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√	X
<b>D<sub>8</sub></b>	X	X	X	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	√	X
<b>D<sub>9</sub></b>	X	X	X	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	√	X
<b>D<sub>10</sub></b>	√	X	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	X
<b>G</b>	X	√	X	√	X	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√
<b>IS</b>	X	√	X	√	X	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√
<b>P</b>	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√	X	√	X	X	X	√	X
<b>SC</b>	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√	X	√	X	X	X	√	X

Table 1

Table 2 is again a two-dimensional array, but in this case the dance genres and the other activities define both the rows and columns. The elements of the arrays are the associations between the pairs of genres. This relation is calculated from Table 1 simply by counting the number of pair-wise matches between the various rows in Table 1. For example, the number of matches between D<sub>1</sub> (row 1) and G (row 11) is 9, so this number is entered in

the cell column 1, row 9 in table 2. Clearly the table is symmetric since matching is a symmetric relation, and the diagonal will represent perfect matching ( $D_1:D1$ ,  $D_2:D2$ , etc.) so this and the remaining half of the table can be omitted. The results need not be normalised to a proportion, but could and should be, were we to go on to investigate whether a change in the number of elements significantly changed the resulting classification.

The results shown in the table are very interesting. It is obvious that the romantic, classical and neoclassical ballet have many elements in common and as, we shall see, they cluster together no matter how high the threshold level is. The same can be said for  $D_4$  and onwards, up to  $D_9$ . This indicates that the various genres of modern dance cluster together and their relation is quite strong as well. It is worth noting that in the case of Pina Bausch and Tanztheater ( $D_{10}$ ) we detect a turn to some of the characteristics of earlier genres (i.e. ballet) and a detachment from the principles of modern abstract dance.



	<b>D<sub>1</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>2</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>3</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>4</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>5</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>6</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>7</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>8</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>9</sub></b>	<b>D<sub>10</sub></b>	<b>G</b>	<b>IS</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>SC</b>
<b>D<sub>1</sub></b>														
<b>D<sub>2</sub></b>	15													
<b>D<sub>3</sub></b>	13	13												
<b>D<sub>4</sub></b>	11	11	13											
<b>D<sub>5</sub></b>	10	10	12	14										
<b>D<sub>6</sub></b>	9	9	11	13	14									
<b>D<sub>7</sub></b>	10	10	12	12	13	14								
<b>D<sub>8</sub></b>	8	8	10	12	13	14	13							
<b>D<sub>9</sub></b>	8	8	10	12	13	14	13	15						
<b>D<sub>10</sub></b>	13	13	13	13	12	11	12	10	10					
<b>G</b>	9	9	11	11	10	9	8	10	10	10				
<b>IS</b>	9	9	11	11	10	9	8	10	10	10	15			
<b>P</b>	9	9	9	11	10	11	10	10	10	11	7	7		
<b>SC</b>	9	9	9	11	10	11	10	10	10	11	7	7	15	

Table 2

We now use Table 2 to produce the family resemblance graph. To do so we tentatively set a matching level, at and above which we draw a line signifying significant similarity between two elements of the putative resemblance diagram. Thus any two members of the cluster space which have such a high similarity are joined, and those lower are not. This immediately produces a visually informative graph (Figure 1) with some elements having high



similarity with other elements of a group while more 'distant' elements are relatively unconnected, and are not natural members of the cluster.

The choice of threshold significance level is conventional, but not arbitrary. We are trying systematically to map concept usage in a language game and thus need to find a threshold level which discriminates members of one cluster from another, just as in the language game. To do this we may vary the threshold level (Figures 1 – 4) to investigate the effect of this on the clusters formed.

The following grids show what happens to the clusters when we change the significance level. In the first grid the significance level is set to 11; that is to say, that we connected with a line the genres that have at least 11 attributes in common. We can see in Figure 1 that gymnastics, ice-skating, painting and sculpture are connected with the various dance genres with at least two lines. Painting and sculpture are equally connected with three lines since they are both forms of art, as we consider dance to be, while ice-skating and gymnastics are connected with two lines (mainly due to the movement and form attributes that they have in common). In the second grid (Figure 2) we raised the significance level to 12. It is more than obvious that gymnastics is only connected with ice-skating and painting with sculpture. This is an indication that the cluster of dance which is created by the different genres is reasonably stable and that we were right in putting all the genres – despite their differences – under the form of life of dance. Here the family resemblance way in which the various genres are related to each other is clearly illustrated. Even if we raise the level of significance to 13 (Figure 3) the cluster remains relatively stable. This is an indication that with the introduction of a new genre the cluster would be likely to remain more or less intact.



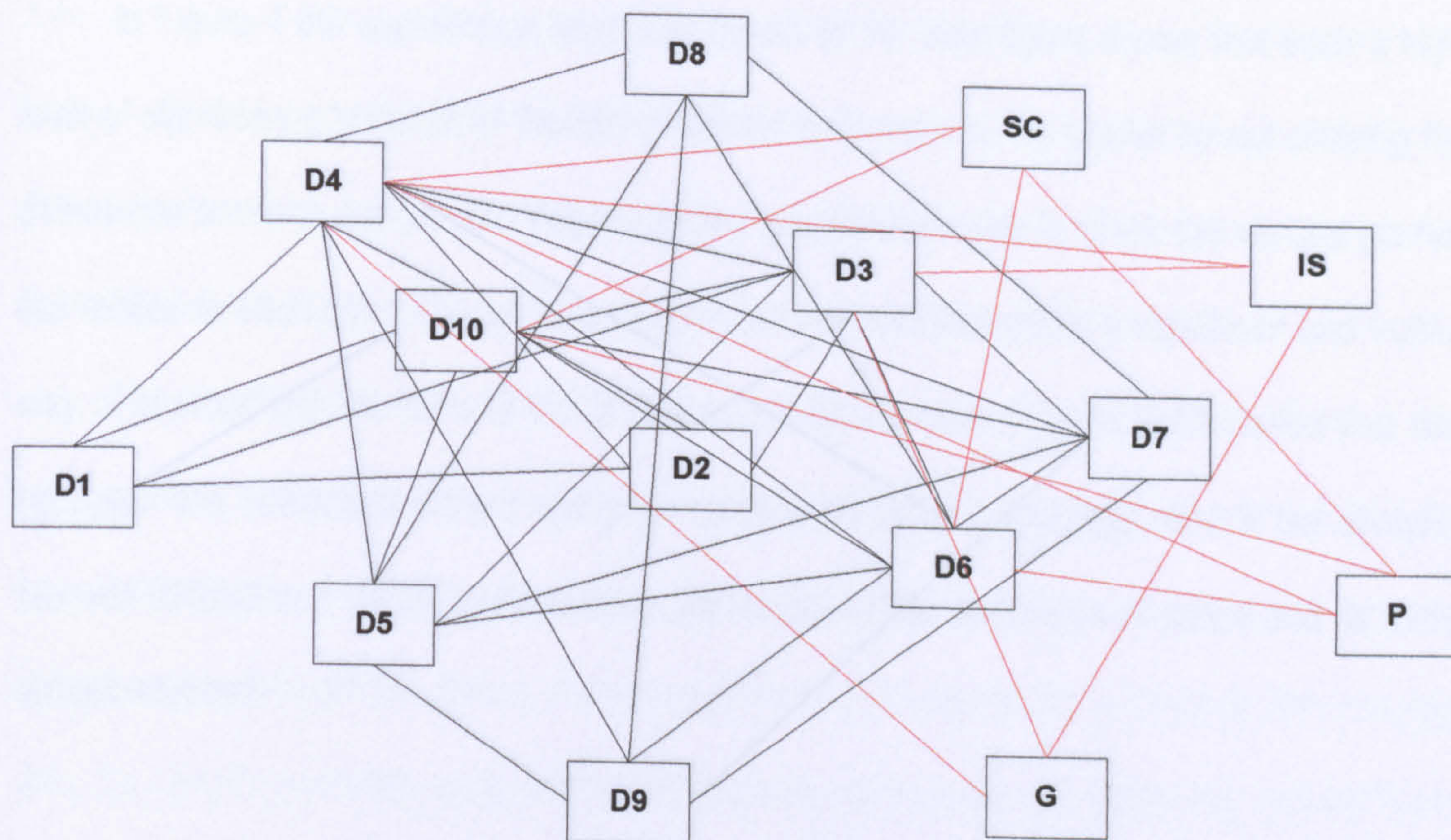


Figure 1 - Significance Level 11

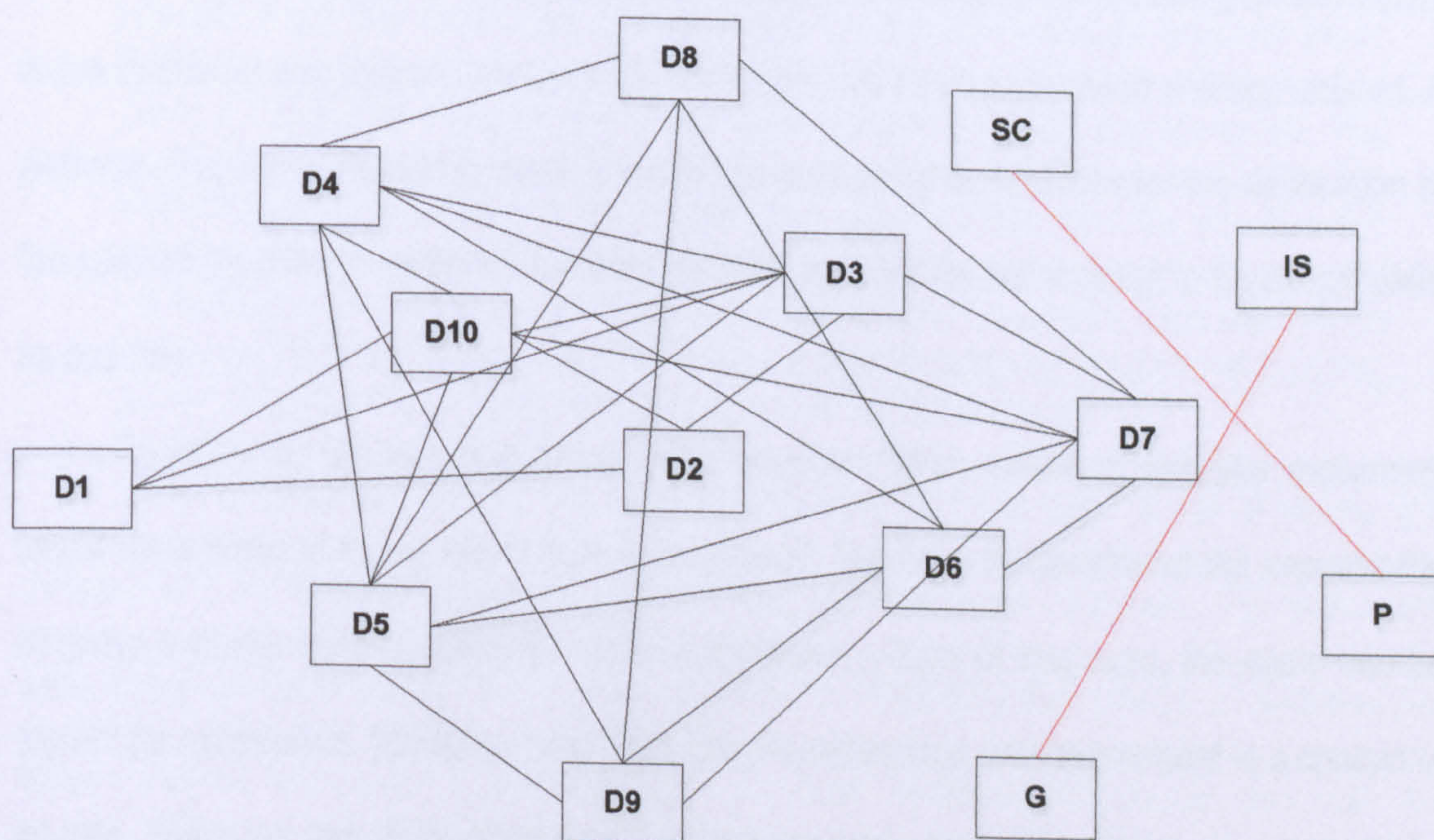


Figure 2 - Significance Level 12



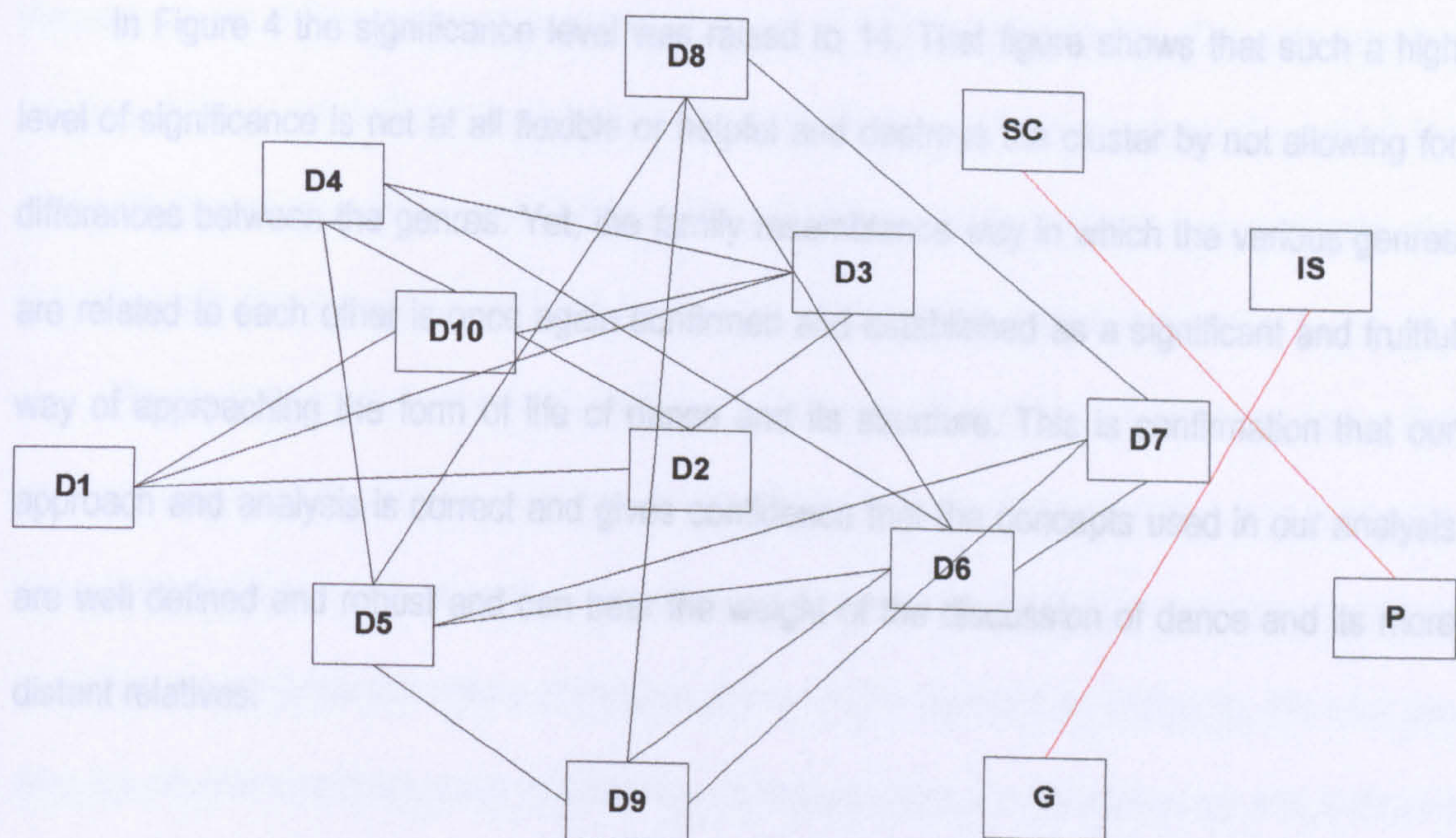


Figure 3 - Significance Level 13

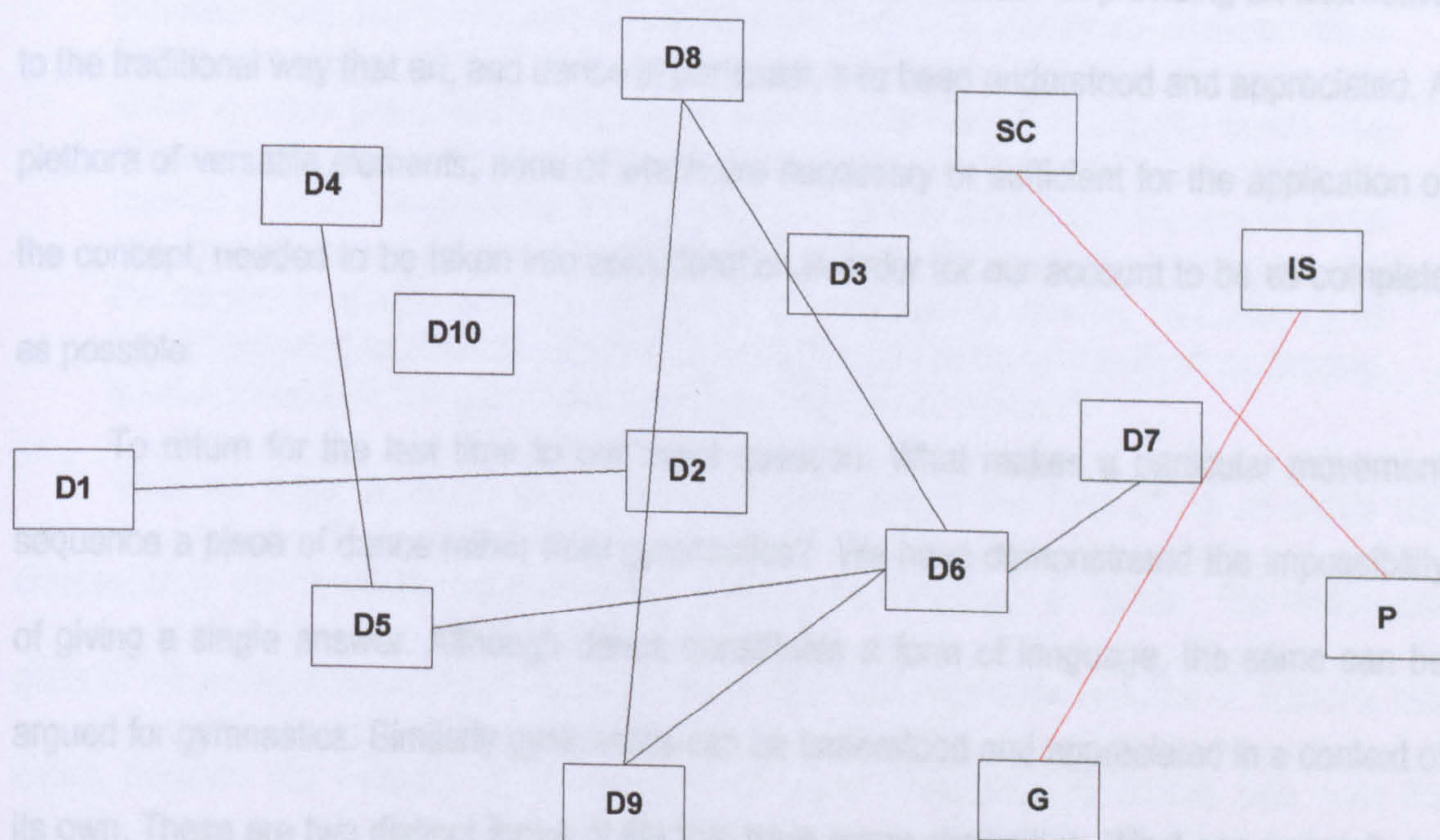


Figure 4 - Significance Level 14



In Figure 4 the significance level was raised to 14. That figure shows that such a high level of significance is not at all flexible or helpful and destroys the cluster by not allowing for differences between the genres. Yet, the family resemblance way in which the various genres are related to each other is once again confirmed and established as a significant and fruitful way of approaching the form of life of dance and its structure. This is confirmation that our approach and analysis is correct and gives confidence that the concepts used in our analysis are well defined and robust and can bear the weight of the discussion of dance and its more distant relatives.

### **7.10. Concluding Remarks**

The above analysis of dance was presented with the intention of providing an alternative to the traditional way that art, and dance in particular, has been understood and appreciated. A plethora of versatile elements, none of which are necessary or sufficient for the application of the concept, needed to be taken into consideration in order for our account to be as complete as possible.

To return for the last time to our initial question: What makes a particular movement sequence a piece of dance rather than gymnastics? We have demonstrated the impossibility of giving a single answer. Although dance constitutes a form of language, the same can be argued for gymnastics. Similarly gymnastics can be understood and appreciated in a context of its own. These are two distinct forms of life that have many similarities. What can generally be attributed to dance is the communication of an abstract message. Communication is peripheral in the case of gymnastics, though one could concede that the latter also communicates a

message, even if that message is merely the one of technical perfection. The only possible solution that we are left with is to say that dance is a structured amalgamation of all the elements discussed in the course of this study and that the analysis shows how someone who is familiar with this form of life will have no problem distinguishing between the two.

We should also bear in mind, in relation to the examples of modern abstract dance that were so often used as counter-examples, that perhaps one aim in their creation was to blur the boundaries between dance and gymnastics, or dance and everyday movement, and to underline the controversial nature of modern dance, which makes it so intriguing. We now see why the counter-examples were misleading – because there are no necessary and sufficient conditions of 'dance'.

Mary Wigman remarks:

The dance begins where gymnastics leave off. There are subtle differences between these two forms, and it is somewhat difficult to demarcate between them. Suffice to say, the differences are neither in the kind nor in the style of bearing, but rather in those unexplainable disparities which cannot be easily put into words. The single gestures, isolated in themselves, do not make the dance, but rather the manner in which the gestures are connected in and by movement: the way in which one form of movement is organically developed from its preceding movement, and the manner in which it leads us organically into the next movement. That which is no longer apparent or obvious, which may be said to 'lie between the lines' of dancing, is what transforms the gymnastic movement into that of dance.<sup>318</sup>

What we have achieved is to outline the elements of the form of life of dance and consequently the structural components of a so-called language of dance. The tables and grids of the previous section can be used as a tool to investigate the network of relations that exists between the different dance genres and other activities. We should also note the importance of significance levels in this case. It is more than obvious that a very high/strict level of similarity results in the breaking of the clusters that we want to create and is not

---

<sup>318</sup> Mary Wigman, 'The Philosophy of Modern Dance', in Huxley and Witts, 1996, p.365.



helpful. On the other hand, a very low significance level is equally unhelpful since it does not show the strong relations that exist inside the cluster. Then it is not evident how the first three genres of our exploration are more similar than the various modern dance genres. We reiterate that we are capturing a pre-existing usage which is both dependent upon, and illuminated in linguistic and conceptual practice.

The framework is now set: the different languages of dance that can stem out of the detailed analysis of the different genres and their different constitutive elements are open to exploration. We hope that a more detailed and - perhaps more complex - network of family resemblances can emerge out of a further analysis that will make the process of communication between choreographers and spectators more intelligible. This endeavour will not be restricted to the genres that we have described in the present study but it can incorporate different forms of dance such as social or religious dance and attempt to de-code their possible meanings and relations with theatre dance. This could contribute to a better understanding of the art of dance and possibly of other movement activities. We have already mentioned the case of ice-dance; it would be interesting to see how it fits into our framework and how it relates to the rest of the genres. The possibilities are numerous. This way one is able to make comparisons between two or more different genres and the same time acquire a better understanding of them by identifying their elements. Moreover, based on such explorations, we can make stronger our case on language(s) of dance. Hopefully, the present exploration will constitute only the starting point of an elaborated system of understanding dance and of analytic dance aesthetics, a way into what can be called a philosophy of dance.

We also hope that the analysis has contributed to making the dance world more familiar and most importantly introducing the magical world of dance. '[...] The entire dance is a

metaphoric whole, a unified meaning-world of its own; [...] a vehicle of piercing revelation, as though of some other order of reality.'<sup>319</sup>

It can be argued that by analyzing dance some of its magic is lost,<sup>320</sup> but it seems that in order to be in a position to appreciate anything, we need to have some degree of understanding of what is happening. We believe that this background knowledge does not limit the pleasure experienced when attending a dance performance; on the contrary it adds considerably to the enjoyment by making the dance intelligible and thus more accessible.

---

<sup>319</sup> Sparshott, 1995, p.243.

<sup>320</sup> 'Some would argue that dancing is to be appreciated spontaneously and not interpreted. Indeed it can also be argued that the attempt to find 'meaning' in a dance can obscure its affective (aesthetic) function, and that one does not find meaning in a dance the same way one does in a book for instance.' Fraleigh, 1999a, p.191.

## Bibliography and References

- Acocella, Joan Ross and Lynn Garafola. 1991. *André Levinson on Dance* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press).
- Adshead-Lansdale, Janet. 1983. *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice* (London: Dance Books)
- Adshead-Lansdale, Janet and June Layson. 1988. *Dance History: A Methodology for Study* (London: Dance Books)
- Adshead-Lansdale, Janet and June Layson. 1994. *Dance History – An Introduction* (London: Routledge)
- Albright, Ann Cooper. 1997. *Choreographing Difference – The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance* (Hanover NH: University Press of New England)
- Alperson, Philip (ed.). 1992. *The Philosophy of the Visual Arts* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press)
- Anderson, Jack. 1997. *Art without Boundaries – The World of Modern Dance* (London: Dance Books)
- Aristotle, *Poetics*. 1968. Introduction, commentary and appendices by D.W.Lucas. (Oxford: Clarendon Press.)
- Amorid, Peter J. 2000. 'Aspects of the Dancer's Role in the Art of Dance', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, **34(1)**: 87-95
- Au, Susan. 1988. *Ballet and Modern Dance*, World of Art Series (London and New York: Thames and Hudson)
- Austin, Richard. 1975. *Images of the Dance* (London: Vision)
- Banes, Sally. 1996. 'Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance', in Michael Huxley and Noel Witts eds, *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (London and New York: Routledge) 30-3
- Barrett, Cyril. 1973. 'Are Bad Works of Art 'Works of Art'?', in *Philosophy and the Arts*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, vol.6, 1971-1972 (London: Macmillan) 182-93
- Batteaux, Charles. 1746. *Les Beaux Arts R—duits × un Même Principe* (Paris, Saillart et Nyon)

- Beardsley, Monroe C. 1975. *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present - A Short History* (Tuscaloosa, Al.: University of Alabama Press)
- Beardsmore, R.W. 1995 'Art and Family Resemblances', *Philosophical Investigations*, **18(3)**:199-215
- Beaumont, Cyril W. 1982 *The Ballet Called Swan Lake* (New York: Dance Horizons) [1<sup>st</sup> publ. 1952]
- Bell, Clive. 1923. *Art* (London: Chatto and Windus)
- Best, David. 1974. *Expression in Movement and the Arts: A Philosophical Inquiry* (London: Lepus)
- Best, David. 1978. *Philosophy and Human Movement* (London: George Allen and Unwin)
- Best, David, 1985, *Feeling and Reason in the Arts* (London, George Allen and Unwin.
- Blom, Lynne-Anne and Tarin L. Chaplin. 1988. *The Moment of Movement - Dance Improvisation* (London: Dance Books)
- Blom, Lynne-Anne and Tarin L.Chaplin. 1989. *The Intimate Act of Choreography* (London: Dance Books)
- Bournoville, August. 1979. *My Theatre Life*, vol.2, trans. by Patricia N. McAndrews (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press)
- Bremser, Martha (ed.) 1999 *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Broadhurst, Susan. 1999. *Liminal Acts - A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory* (London and New York: Cassell)
- Bub, Jeffrey. 1989. 'The Philosophy of Quantum Mechanics', *Brit. J. Phil. Sci.*, **40**:191-212
- Bullough, Edward. 1957. *Aesthetics - Lectures and Essays* (London: Bowes and Bowes)
- Bunnin, N. and E.P. Tsui-James (eds). 1996. *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* (London and New York: Blackwell)
- Carlson, Marvin. 1996. *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Carnap, Rudolf. 1962. *Logical Foundations of Probability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)
- Carroll, Noël. 1981. 'Post-Modern Dance and Expression' in Gordon Fancher and Gerald Myers eds, *Philosophical Essays on Dance* (Booklyn: Dance Horizons): 95-103.



- Carroll, Noël. 1999. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Carroll, Noel and Sally Banes. 1999. 'Dance, Imitation and Representation' in Graham McFee ed., *Dance, Education and Philosophy*. University of Brighton, Chelsea School research Centre Edition, vol.7 (Oxford: Meyer and Meyer Sport)
- Carter, Alexandra (ed.). 1998. *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Chujoy, Anatole and P.W. Manchester (eds). 1967. *The Dance Encyclopedia* (New York: Simon and Schuster)
- Cohen, Selma-Jeanne. 1953. 'Dance as an Art of Imitation', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, **12(2)**: 232-36
- Cohen, Selma-Jeanne. 1965. *The Modern Dance – Seven Statements of Belief* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press)
- Cohen, Selma –Jeanne. 1974. *Dance as a Theater Art* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co)
- Cohen, Selma-Jeanne. 1982. *Next Week, Swan Lake: Reflections on Dance and Dances* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press)
- Cohen, Selma-Jeanne et al (eds). 1998. *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, 6 vols. (London: Oxford University Press)
- Cohen, Ted and Paul Guyer. 1982. *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)
- Coleman, Francis X.J. 1974. *The Harmony of Reason: A Study of Kant's Aesthetics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press)
- Collingwood, R.G., 1938. *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Cooper, David (ed.) 1992. *A Companion to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Copeland, Roger and Marshall Cohen (eds). 1983. *What is Dance?* (New York: Oxford University Press)
- Craig, Edward (ed.). 1998. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 10 vols. (London and New York: Routledge)
- Crawford, Donald W. 1974 *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press)
- Croce, Benedetto. 1953. *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. by Douglas Ainslie and Peter Owen (London: Vision Press) [1<sup>st</sup> publ.1909]

- Croce, Benedetto. 1965. *Guide to Aesthetics*, trans. by Patrick Romanell (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill) [1<sup>st</sup> publ.1913]
- Crompton, Robert Morris. 1984. *Dancing: A Journal devoted to the Terpsichorean Art, Physical Culture and Fashionable Entertainment* (Toronto: Press of Terpsichore)
- Crowther, Paul. 1989. *The Kantian Sublime - From Morality to Art*, Oxford Philosophical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Cunningham, Merce. 1968. *Changes: Notes on Choreography* (New York: Something Else)
- Cunningham, Merce. 1985. *The Dancer and the Dance, Merce Cunningham in conversation with Jacqueline Lesschaeve* (New York and London: Marion Boyars)
- Danto, Arthur C. 1999. *The Body/Body Problem – Selected Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press)
- Davidson, David. 1973. 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', *Proc. American Philosophical Assoc.*, 67: 5-20
- Deakin, Irving. 1956. *At the Ballet* (London: Nelson)
- Denby, Edwin. 1949. *Looking at the Dance* (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy)
- Denby, Edwin. 1986. *Dance Writings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf)
- Desmond, Jane C. 1997. *Meaning in Motion, New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press)
- Dewey, John. 1934. *Art as Experience* (New York: Milton Balch)
- Dickie, George. 1974. *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press)
- Dickie, George. 1984. *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art* (New York: Haven Publications)
- Dickie, George, Richard J. Sclafani and Ronald Roblin (eds). 1989. *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's Press)
- Douglas, Mary and David Hull (eds). 1992. *How Classification Works – Nelson Goodman Among the Social Sciences* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press)
- Duncan, Isadora. 1928. *The Art of the Dance* (New York: Theater Arts)
- Ellis, Brian. 1965. *Basic Concepts of Measurement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Ellis, Havelock. 1923. *The Dance of Life* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin)

- Elton, William. 1954. *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Fancher, Gordon, and Gerald Myers (eds). 1981. *Philosophical Essays On Dance*, based on a conference at the American Dance Festival, 1981 (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons)
- Feagin, Susan and Patrick Maynard. 1997. *Aesthetics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press)
- Foster, Susan Leigh (ed.). 1986. *Reading Dance: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press)
- Foster, Susan Leigh. 1995. *Choreographing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press)
- Foster, Susan Leigh. 1996. *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Fraleigh, Sondra Horton. 1987. *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press)
- Fraleigh, Sondra Horton. 1999a. 'Witnessing the Frog Pont', in Sondra Horton and Penelope Hanstein eds, *Researching Dance - Evolving Modes of Inquiry* (London: Dance Books)
- Fraleigh, Sondra Horton and Penelope Hanstein (eds.). 1999b. *Researching Dance - Evolving Modes of Inquiry* (London: Dance Books)
- Franko, Mark. 1993. *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Franko, Mark. 1995. *Dancing Modernism/ Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press)
- Friedman, James Michael. 1976. *Dancer and Spectator: An Aesthetic Distance* (San Francisco: Ballet Monographs)
- Friesen, Joanna. 1979. 'Aristotle's Dramatic Theories Applied to Dance Criticism', in Diana Theodores Taplin ed., *New Directions in Dance – Collected Writings From the Seventh Dance in Canada Conference, University of Waterloo* (Oxford: Pergamon Press)
- Gardner, Sebastian. 1996. 'Aesthetics', in N. Bunnin and E.P. Tsui-James eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* (London and New York: Blackwell)
- Garner, Stanton B. 1994. *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press)
- Gasking, Douglas, 1960. 'Clusters', *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, **38(1)**: 1-36.
- Gautier, Theophile. 1986. *Gautier on Dance*, ed. and trans. by Ivor Guest (London: Dance Books)



- Goellner, W. Ellen and Jacqueline Murphy Shea. 1995. *Bodies of the Text – Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press)
- Goldberg, RoseLee. 1988. *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson)
- Goldsmith, Marcella Tarozzi. 1999. *The Future of Art – An Aesthetics of the New and the Sublime* (New York: State University of New York Press)
- Gombrich, E.H. 1950. *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon Press)
- Gombrich, E.H. 1960. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, (New York: Pantheon Books)
- Goodman, Nelson. 1969. *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (London: Oxford University Press)
- Goodman, Nelson. 1992. 'Seven Strictures on Similarity', in Mary Douglas and David Hull eds, *How Classification Works – Nelson Goodman among the Social Sciences* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press):13-23.
- Graham, Gordon. 1997. *Philosophy of the Arts - An Introduction to Aesthetics* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Graham, Martha. 1991. *Blood Memory: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday)
- Greene, Theodore. 1940. *The Arts and the Art of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)
- Grice, Paul. 1957. 'Meaning', *Philosophical Review*, 66: 377-388.
- Grosz, Elisabeth, 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press)
- Grosz, Elisabeth. 1995. *Space, Time and Perversion – Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Hagberg, G.L. 1994. *Meaning and Interpretation, Wittgenstein, Henry James and Literary Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press)
- Hagberg, G.L. 1995. *Art as Language – Wittgenstein, Meaning and Aesthetic Theory* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press)
- Hammond, Michael, Jane Howarth and Russell Keat. 1991. *Understanding Phenomenology* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Hanfling, Oswald. 1992. *Philosophical Aesthetics – An Introduction* (Blackwell Publishers in Association with the Open University)



- Hanna, Judith Lynne. 1979. *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Non-Verbal Communication* (Austin: University of Texas Press)
- Hanna, Judith Lynne. 1983. *The Performer-Audience Connection: Emotion to Metaphor in Dance and Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press)
- Haskell, Arnold L. 1962. 'The Meanings of Classical Dancing', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 2: 55-58.
- H'Doubler, Margaret. 1985. *Dance - A Creative Art Experience* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press) [1<sup>st</sup> publ. 1940]
- Hodgson, John. 2001. *Mastering Movement – The Life and Work of Rudolf Laban* (London: Methuen)
- Hook, Sidney. 1966. *Art and Philosophy - A Symposium* (New York: New York University Press)
- Homer, Chris and Emrys Westacott (eds). 2000. 'Philosophy of Art' (Ch. 7) in *Thinking through Philosophy - An introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Horst, Louis. 1940. *Pre-Classic Dance Forms* (New York: Dance Observer)
- Hospers, John. 1955. 'The Concept of Artistic Expression', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55: 313-44
- Hospers, John (ed.). 1969. *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics* (London: Macmillan)
- Howell, Anthony. 1999. *The Analysis of Performance Art: A Guide to its Theory and Practice*, (London: Routledge (in the series: Routledge Harwood Contemporary Theatre Studies))
- Hutchinson–Guest, Ann. 1984. *Dance Notation - The Process of Recording Movement on Paper* (London: Dance Books)
- Huxley, Michael and Noel Witts (eds). 1996. *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Jardine, Nicholas and Robin Sibson. 1971. *Mathematical Taxonomy*, Willey Series in Probability and Mathematical Statistics (London, John Willey & Sons)
- Jowitt, Deborah. 1988. *Time and the Dancing Image* (New York: William Morrow)
- Kaelin, Eugene. 1970. *Art and Existence: A Phenomenological Aesthetics* (Lewisburg PA, Bucknell University Press)
- Kaepler, Adrienne L. 1972. 'Method and Theory in Analyzing Dance Structure with an Analysis of Tongan Dance', *Ethnomusicology*, 16: 173-215

- Kane, Angela. 1989. 'Richard Alston: Twenty-One Years in Choreography', *Dance Research* 7(2): 16-54
- Kant, Immanuel. 1959. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* – trans. by John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press)
- Kant, Immanuel. 1987. *Critique of Judgment: Including the First Introduction*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company) [1<sup>st</sup> publ. 1781]
- Katz, Ruth. 1992. 'History as Compliance: The Development of Western Musical Notation in the Light of Goodman's Requirements', in Mary Douglas and David Hull eds, *How Classification Works – Nelson Goodman among the Social Sciences* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).99-128.
- Kearney, Richard and David Rasmussen (eds). 2001. *Continental Aesthetics – Romanticism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, Blackwell Philosophy Anthologies (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Kelly, Michael et al (eds). 1998. *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (London: Oxford University Press)
- Kemal, Salim. 1986. *Kant and Fine Art - An Essay on Kant and the Philosophy of Fine Art and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Kemal, Salim. 1992. *Kant's Aesthetic Theory - An Introduction* (London: Macmillan)
- Kemal, Salim and Ivan Gaskell. 1991. *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Kivy, Peter. 1980. *The Corded Shell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)
- Koegler, Horst (ed.). 1982. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ballet* (London: Oxford University Press)
- Korsmeyer, Carolyn (ed.). 1998. *Aesthetics: The Big Questions* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Kuhn, Thomas S. 1996. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press)
- Laban, Rudolf. 1974. *The Language of Movement* (Boston: PLAYS Inc.)
- Laban, Rudolf and Lisa Ullmann. 1971. *The Mastery of Movement* (New York: PLAYS Inc.)
- Lakatos, Imre. 1978. 'The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes' in Imre Lakatos, *Philosophical Papers*, vol.1, ed. by J. Worrall and G. Currie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 8-101
- Langer, Susanne. 1953. *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art developed from 'Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons)

- Langer, Susanne. 1957. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press)
- Levin, David–Michael. 1990. *Postmodernism in Dance: Dance, Discourse, Democracy in Postmodernism - Philosophy and the Arts*, Continental Philosophy III, (London: Routledge)
- Levinson, André, 1982. *Ballet Old and New*, trans. by Susan Cook Summer (New York: Dance Horizons)
- Lonsdale, Steven. 1981. *Animals and the Origins of Dance* (London: Thames and Hudson)
- Lyas, Colin. 1997. *Aesthetics*, Fundamentals of Philosophy, ed. by John Shand (London: UCL Press)
- McFee, Graham. 1992. *Understanding Dance* (London: Routledge)
- McFee, Graham (ed.) 1999a. *Dance, Education and Philosophy*, University of Brighton, Chelsea School Research Centre Edition, vol.7 (Oxford: Meyer and Meyer Sport)
- McFee, Graham. 1999b. 'Wittgenstein on Art and Aspects', *Philosophical Investigations*, **22**: 262-84.
- Mackrell, Judith. 1997. *Reading Dance* (London: Michael Joseph)
- Margolis, Joseph (ed.). 1987. *Philosophy Looks at the Arts - Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press)
- Martin, John. 1965. *The Modern Dance in Theory With a New Introduction by Jack Anderson* (Princeton: Dance Horizons) [1<sup>st</sup> publ. 1933]
- Martin, John. 1975. *Introduction to the Dance* (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons) [1<sup>st</sup> publ. 1939]
- Mazo, Joseph H. 1976. *Dance is a Contact Sport*, 1st ed., New York, Saturday Review Press, 1974 (New York: Da Capo Press)
- Mellor, A. Philip and Chris Shilling. 1997. *Re-forming the Body – Religion, Community and Modernity* (London: Sage Publication in association with TCS)
- Moran, Dermot. 2000. *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Morris, Gay. 1996. *Moving Words – Re-Writing Dance* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Mueller, Gustav. 1944. *The World as Spectacle: An Aesthetic View of Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library)
- Nadel, Myron Howard and Constance Nadel-Miller (eds). 1978. *The Dance Experience – Readings in Dance Appreciation* (New York: Universe Books)



- Neil, Alex and Aaron Ridley (eds). 1995. *The Philosophy of Art – Readings Ancient and Modern* (London: McGraw-Hill)
- Newman, Barbara. 1982. *Striking a Balance: Dancers talk about Dancing* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin)
- Osborne, Harold. 1960. *Aesthetics in the Modern World* (London: Thames and Hudson)
- Osborne, Harold. 1972. *Aesthetics*, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (London: Oxford University Press)
- Parvaianen, Jaana. 1998. *Bodies Moving and Moved – A Phenomenological Analysis of the Dancing Subject and the Cognitive and Ethical Values of Dance Art* (Tampere: Tampere University Press)
- Phelan, Peggy and Jill Lane. 1998. *The Ends of Performance* (New York and London: New York University Press)
- Piaget, Jean. 1970. *Genetic Epistemology* (London and New York: Columbia University Press)
- Plato. 1993. *The Republic*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Preston–Dunlop, Valerie. 1998. *Looking at Dances: A Choreographical Perspective on Choreography* (London: Verve Publishing)
- Quine, Willard Van Orman. 1961. *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press)
- Redfern, Betty. 1983. *Dance, Art and Aesthetics* (London: Dance Books)
- Reichenbach, Hans. 1951. *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press)
- Reichenbach, Hans. 1957. *The Philosophy of Space and Time* (New York and London: Dover)
- Reid, Louis Arnaud. 1969. *Meaning in the Arts* (London: George Allen and Unwin)
- Royce-Peterson, Anya. 1977. *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press)
- Royce-Peterson, Anya. 1984. *Movement and Meaning: Creativity and Interpretation in Ballet and Mime* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press)
- Savile, Anthony. 1987. *Aesthetic Reconstructions: The Seminal Writing of Lessing, Kant and Schiller*, Aristotelian Society Series, vol.8 (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Sawyer, Elisabeth. 1985. *Dance with the Music: The World of the Ballet Musician* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)



- Schieffelin, Edward L. 1976. *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers* (New York: St. Martin's Press)
- Scholl, Tim. 1994. *From Petipa to Balanchine – Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet* (London and New York: Routledge)
- Scruton, Roger. 1974. *Art and Imagination – A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (London: Methuen)
- Selden, Elisabeth. 1935. *The Dancer's Quest* (Berkeley: University of California Press)
- Shahn, Ben. 1972. *The Shape of Content* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press)
- Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. 1966. *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Madison and Milwaukee, University of Wisconsin Press)
- Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. 1984. *Illuminating Dance* (Lewisburg, NY: Bucknell University Press)
- Shilling, Chris. 1993. *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications in association with TCS)
- Shusterman, Richard. 1989. *Analytic Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Siegel, Marcia B. 1972. *At the Vanishing Point* (New York: Saturday Review Press)
- Siegel, Marcia B. 1985. *The Shapes of Change – Images of American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press)
- Sirridge, Mary and Adina Armelagos. 1977. 'The In's and Out's of Dance: Expression as an Aspect of Style', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, **36**: 15-24
- Snyder, Judith Jaffe. 1954. 'The Expressive Meaning of a Dance', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, **12**: 518-21
- Sorell, Walter. 1971. *The Dancer's Image* (New York: Columbia University Press)
- Sorell, Walter. 1986. *Looking Back in Wonder* (New York: Columbia University Press)
- Souriau, Paul. 1983. *The Aesthetics of Movement*, trans. by Manon Souriau (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press)
- Sparshott, Francis. 1985. 'Some Dimensions of Dance Meaning', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, **25(2)**: 101-14
- Sparshott, Francis. 1988. *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)

- Sparshott, Francis. 1990. 'Contexts of Dance', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, **24(1)**: 73-87
- Sparshott, Francis. 1993. 'The Future of Dance Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, **51(2)**: 227-34
- Sparshott, Francis. 1995. *A Measured Pace - Toward a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance* (Toronto & London: University of Toronto Press)
- Spencer, Paul. 1985. *Society and the Dance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Stolnitz, Jerome. 1965. *Aesthetics, Sources in Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan)
- Taper, Bernard. 1984. *Balanchine: An Autobiography*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Times Books)
- Taplin., Diana Theodores. (ed.). 1979. *New Directions in Dance – Collected Writings from the Seventh Dance in Canada Conference, University of Waterloo* (Oxford: Pergamon Press)
- Thom, Paul. 1993. *For an Audience: A Philosophy of the Performing Arts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).
- Thomas, Helen. 1993. *Dance, Gender and Culture* (London: Macmillan)
- Tilghman, B.R. 1973. 'Wittgenstein, Games and Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, **31**: 517-24
- Tilghman, B.R. 1984. *But is it Art? The Value of Art and the Temptation of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Tilghman, B.R. 1991. *Wittgenstein, Ethics and Aesthetics - The View from Eternity*, Swansea Studies in Philosophy, ed. by D.Z. Phillips (London: Macmillan)
- Todd, George F. 1972. 'Expression without Feeling', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, **30**: 477-88
- Tolstoy, Leo. 1994. *What is Art?*, trans. by Colin Lyas (London: Duckworth) [1<sup>st</sup> publ.1898]
- Torney, Allan. 1971. *The Concept of Expression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)
- Turner, Margery J. 1971. *New Dance - Approaches to Nonliteral Choreography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press)
- Vaganova, Agrippina. 1969. *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet: Russian Ballet Technique* trans. by Anatole Chujoy (New York: Dover Publications)

- Van Praagh, Peggy and Peter Brinson. 1963. *The Choreographic Art - An Outline of its Principles and Craft* (London: Adam and Charles Black)
- Van Vechten, Carl. 1980. *Dance Writings* (New York: Dance Horizons)
- Walton, L. Kendall. 1990. *Mimesis as Make-Believe, On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press)
- Weaver, John. 1792. *An Essay Towards A History of Dancing*, London, J.Tonson, repr. in facsimile in Richard Ralph, 1985, *The Life and Works of John Weaver* (London: Dance Books).
- Weiss, Paul. 1961. *Nine Basic Arts* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press)
- Weitz Morris. 1956. 'The Role of Theory in Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 15: 27-35
- Welton, Donn. 1998. *Body and Flesh – A Philosophical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Wigman, Mary. 1966. *The Language of Dance*, trans, by Walter Sorell (London: Macdonald and Evans)
- Wigman, Mary. 1996. 'The Philosophy of Modern Dance', in Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, eds, *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996) [1st publ. in *Europa* 1 (May-July 1933)]
- Williams, Drid. 1991. *Ten Lectures on the Theories of the Dance* (Metuchen, NJ and London: Scarecrow Press)
- Winch, Peter. 1988. *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (London, Routledge)
- Winearls, Jane. 1990. *Choreography - The Art of the Body, An Anatomy of Expression* (London: Dance Books)
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1966. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, compiled from notes taken by Yorick Smythies, Rush Rhees and James Taylor, ed. by Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1980. *Culture and Value*, ed. by G.H. von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1993. *Philosophical Occasions 1912 – 1951*, ed. by James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company)
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1997. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, (Malden, Mass. and Oxford.: Blackwell)

- Wollheim, Richard. 1980. *Art and its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Woodward, Kathryn. 1997. *Identity and Difference* (London: Sage Publications in association with The Open University)
- Zelinger, Jacob. 1979 'Semiotics and Theatre Dance', in Diana Theodores Taplin ed., *New Directions in Dance – Collected Writings from the Seventh Dance in Canada Conference, University of Waterloo* (Oxford: Pergamon Press)
- Ziff, Paul. 1981. 'About the Appreciation of Dance', in Gordon Fancher and Gerald Myers eds, *Philosophical Essays on Dance*, based on a conference at the American Dance Festival, 1981 (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons)